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Hess et al.

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(54) **FLAME SIMULATING ASSEMBLY**

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(22) Filed: **Dec. 11, 2006**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 10/759,143, filed on Jan. 20, 2004, now Pat. No. 7,162,820.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G09F 19/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **40/428; 40/219**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** **40/428, 40/219**

See application file for complete search history.

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Cross-referencing: Claims as filed from U.S. Appl. No. 11/622,771 which is also a C-I-P of the same parent application (U.S. Appl. No. 10/759,143, now Patent No. 7,162,820).

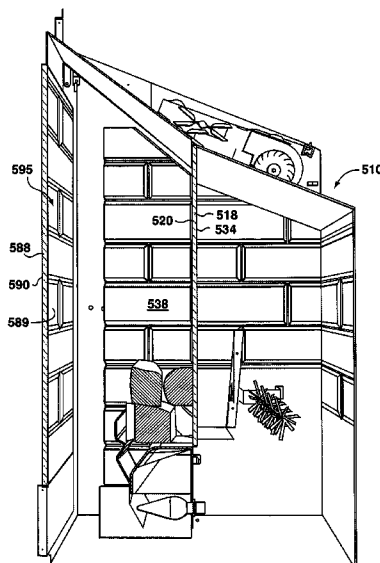
Cross-referencing: Claims as allowed in parent application, Patent No. 7,162,820.

Primary Examiner—Gary C Hoge

(57) **ABSTRACT**

An assembly including a substantially transparent front panel and a partially translucent screen with a partially reflective front surface positioned to face a rear side of the front panel and spaced apart therefrom by a predetermined distance. A first image is defined on the rear side for reflection by the front surface to provide a virtual image thereof. A back wall is positioned behind the screen and displays a second image on an exposed surface thereof facing the rear surface of the screen. The exposed surface is spaced apart from the front surface of the screen by the predetermined distance. The virtual image is located substantially in the plane of the exposed surface so that the virtual image appears to be positioned behind the screen.

21 Claims, 27 Drawing Sheets



US 7,673,408 B2

Page 2

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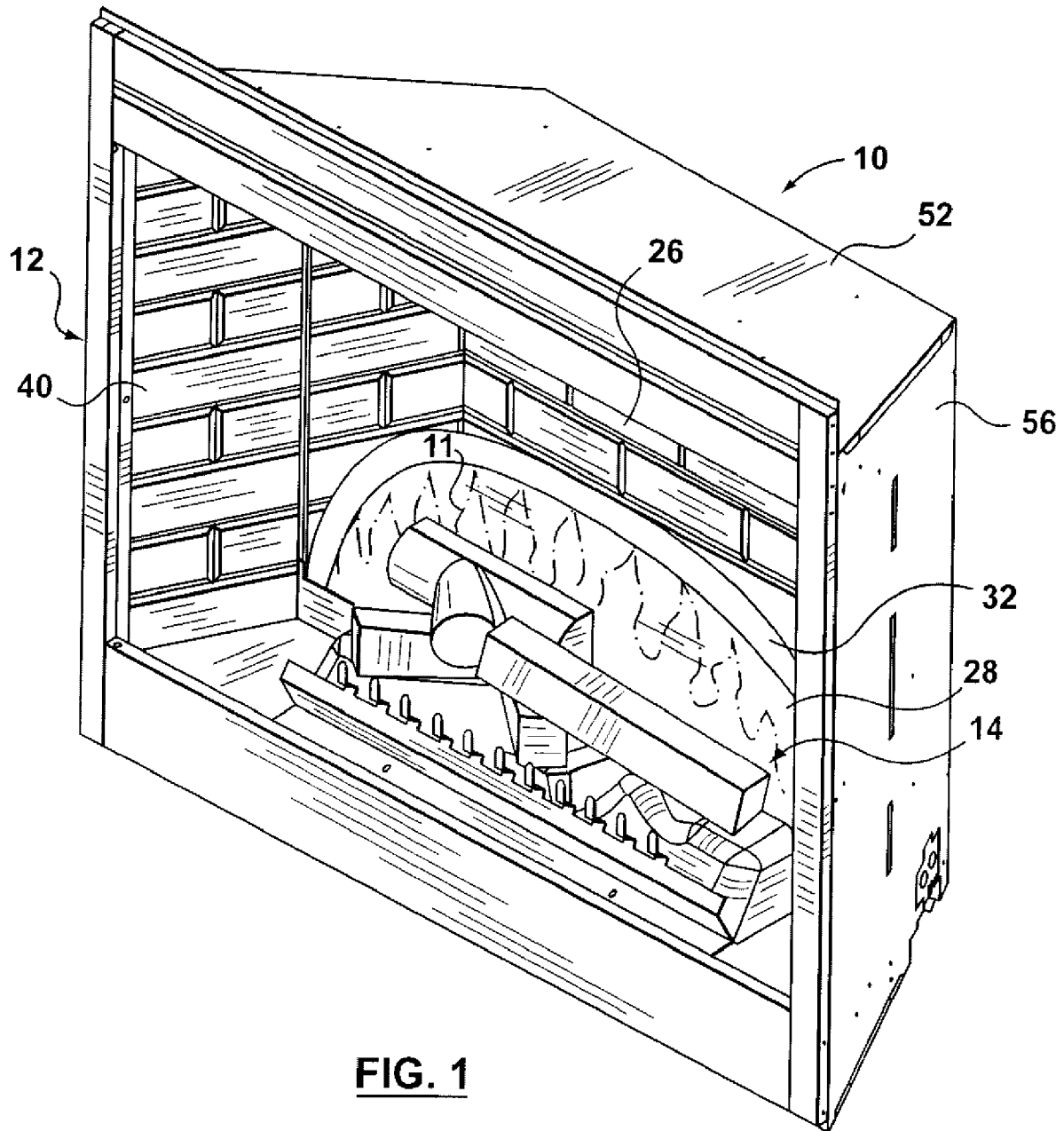


FIG. 1

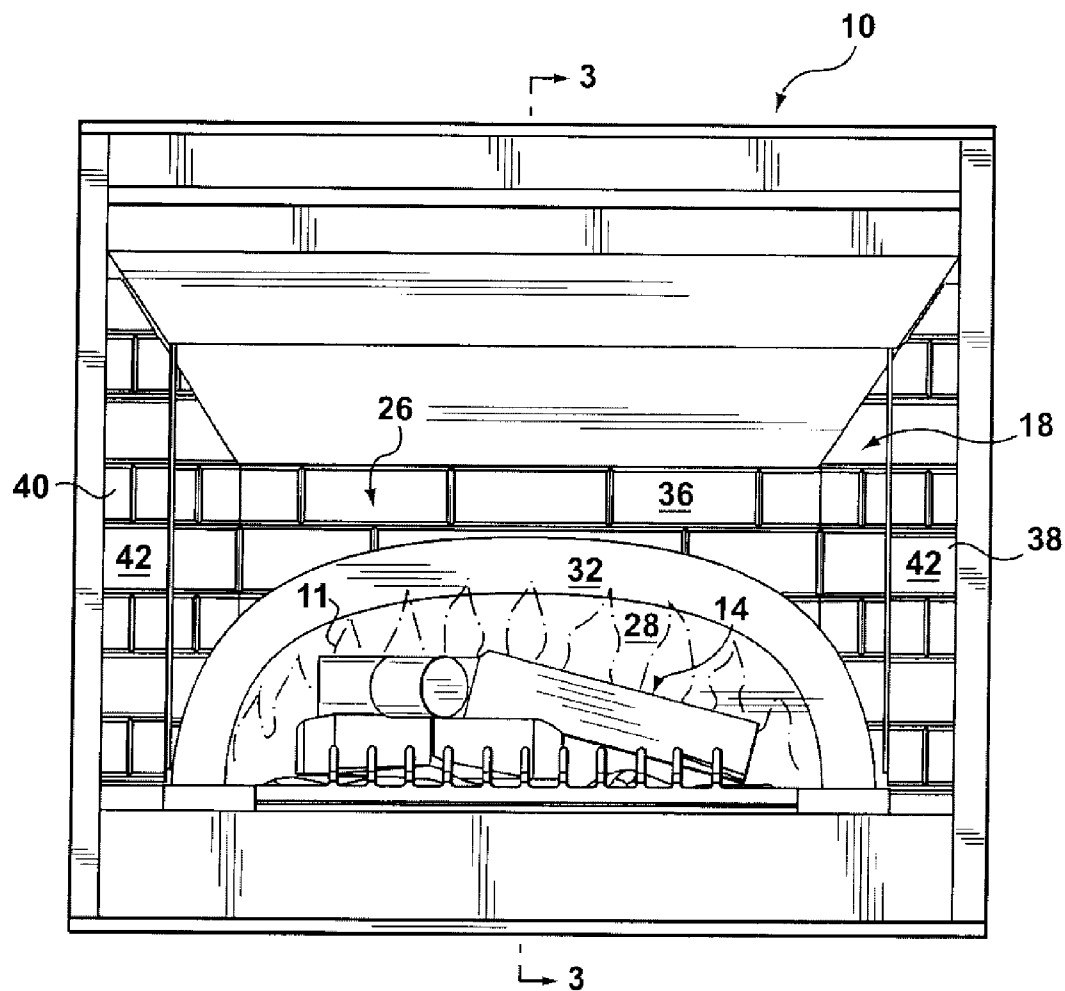


FIG. 2A

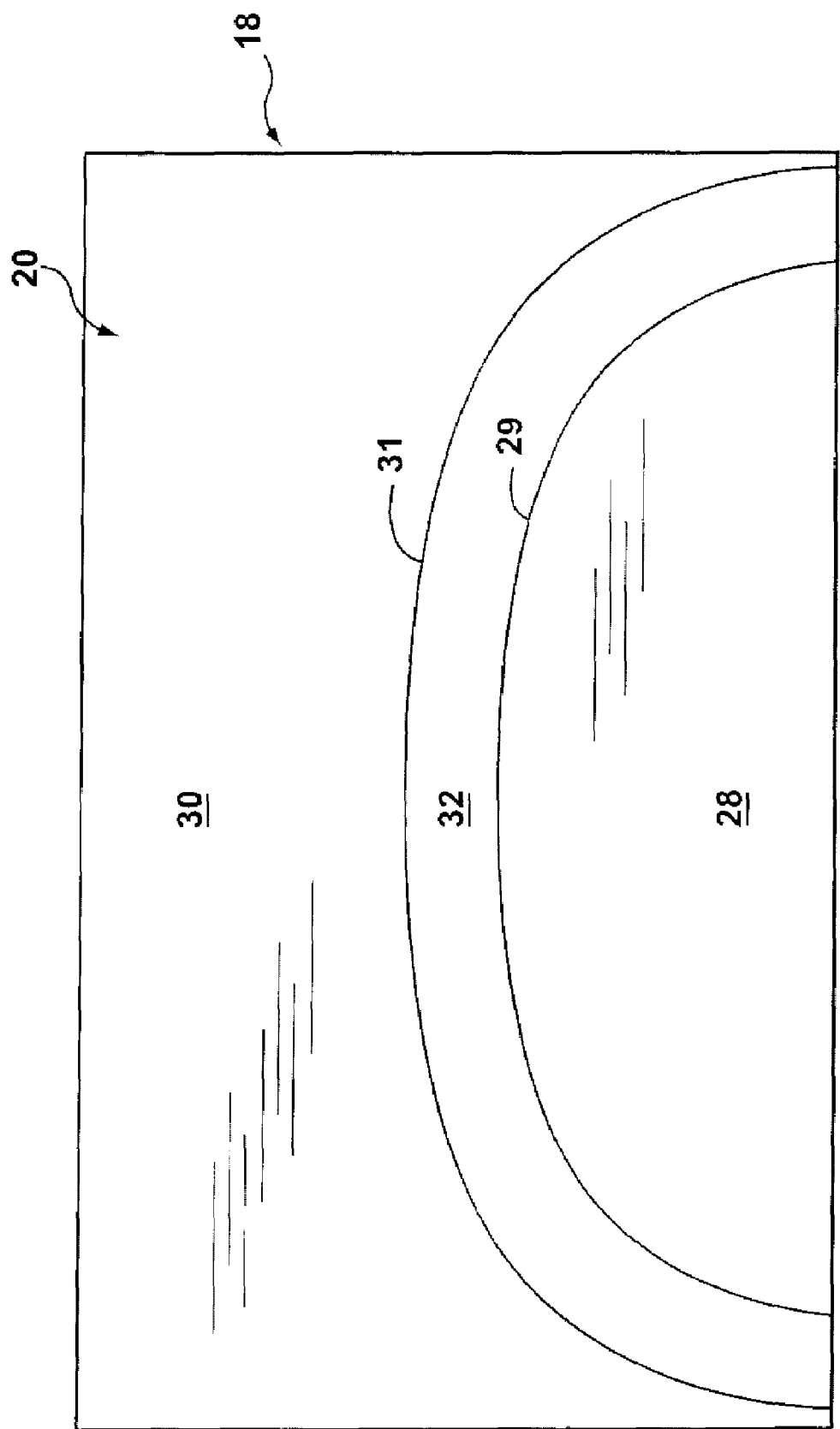


FIG. 2B

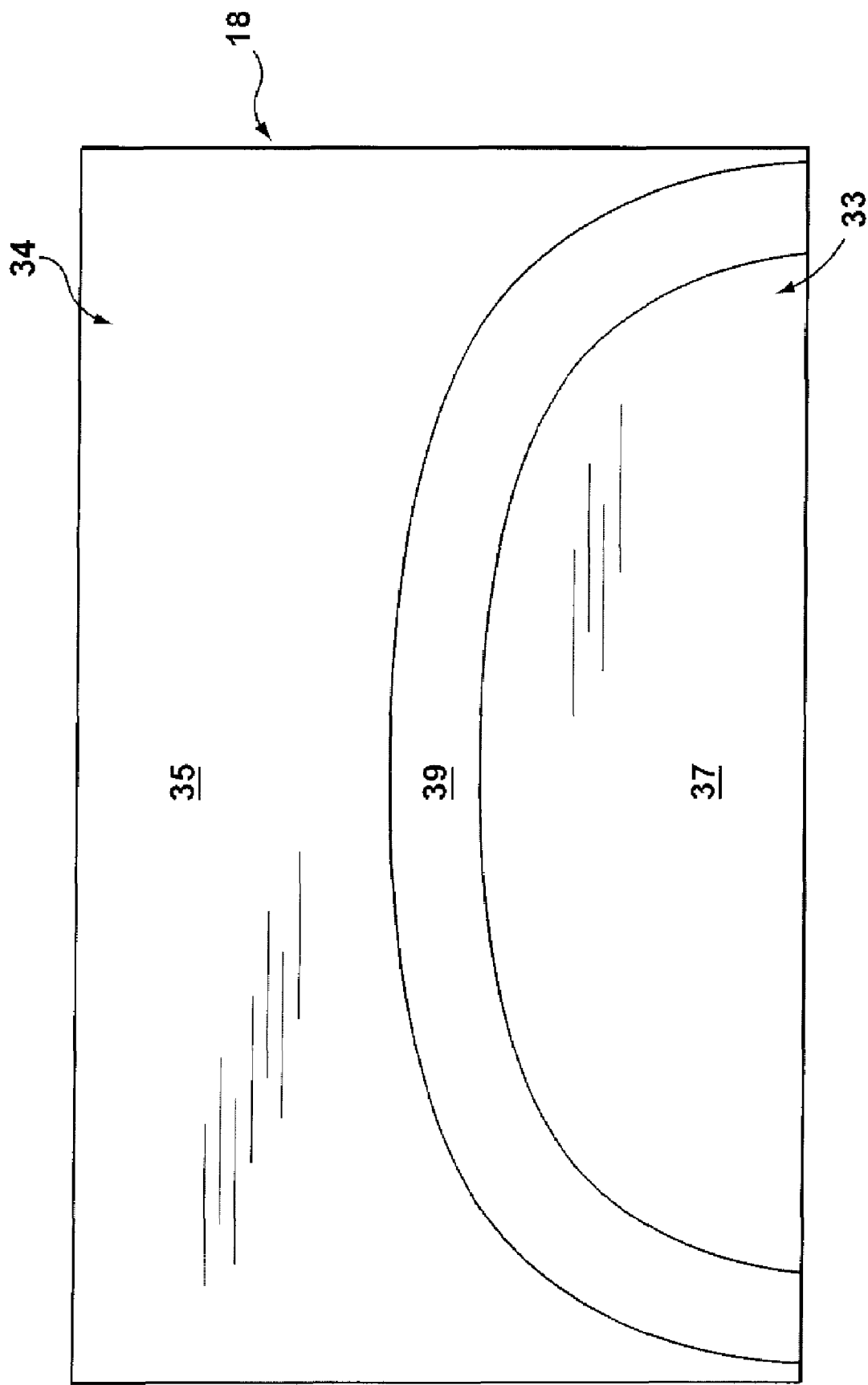


FIG. 2C

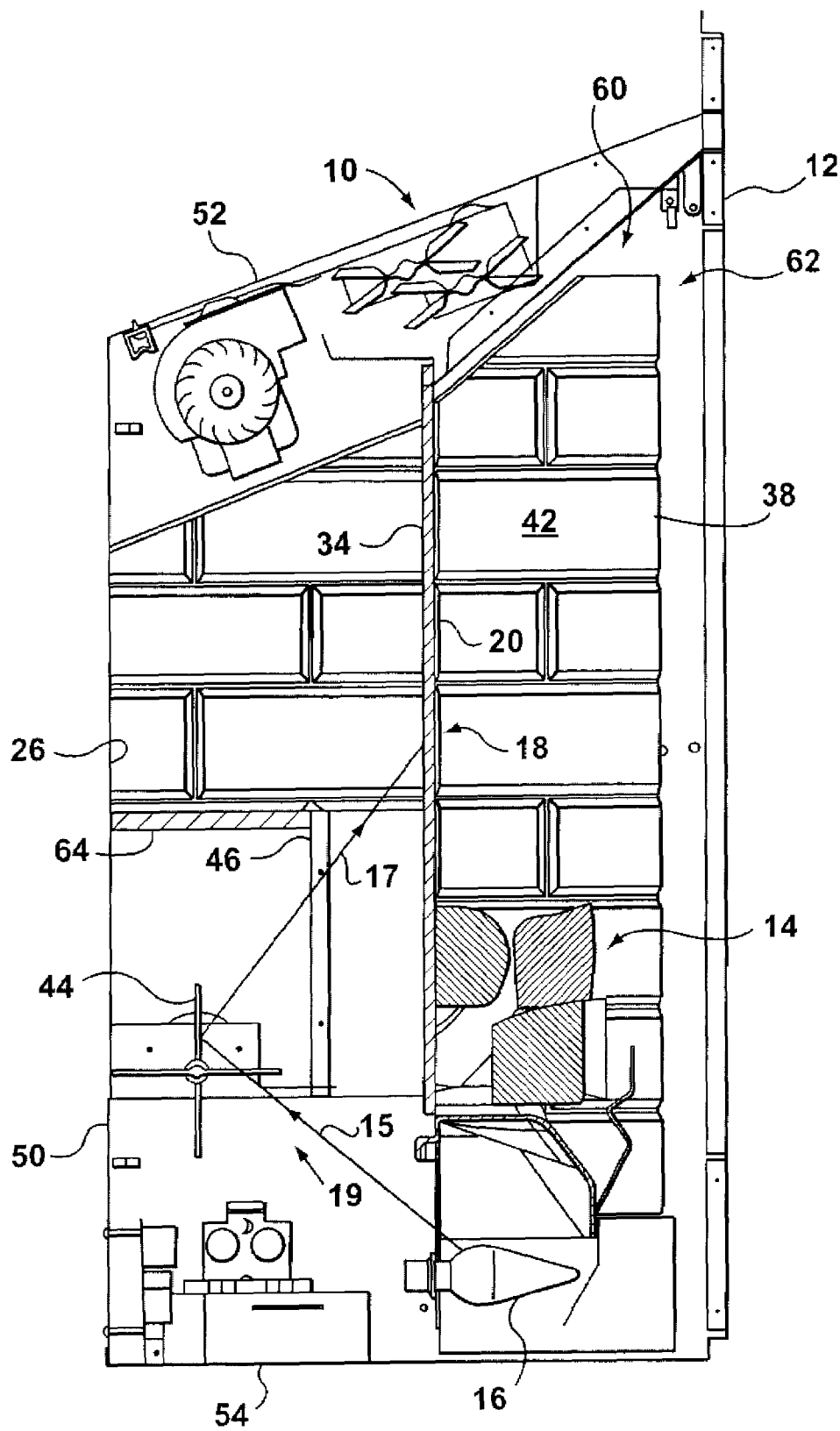
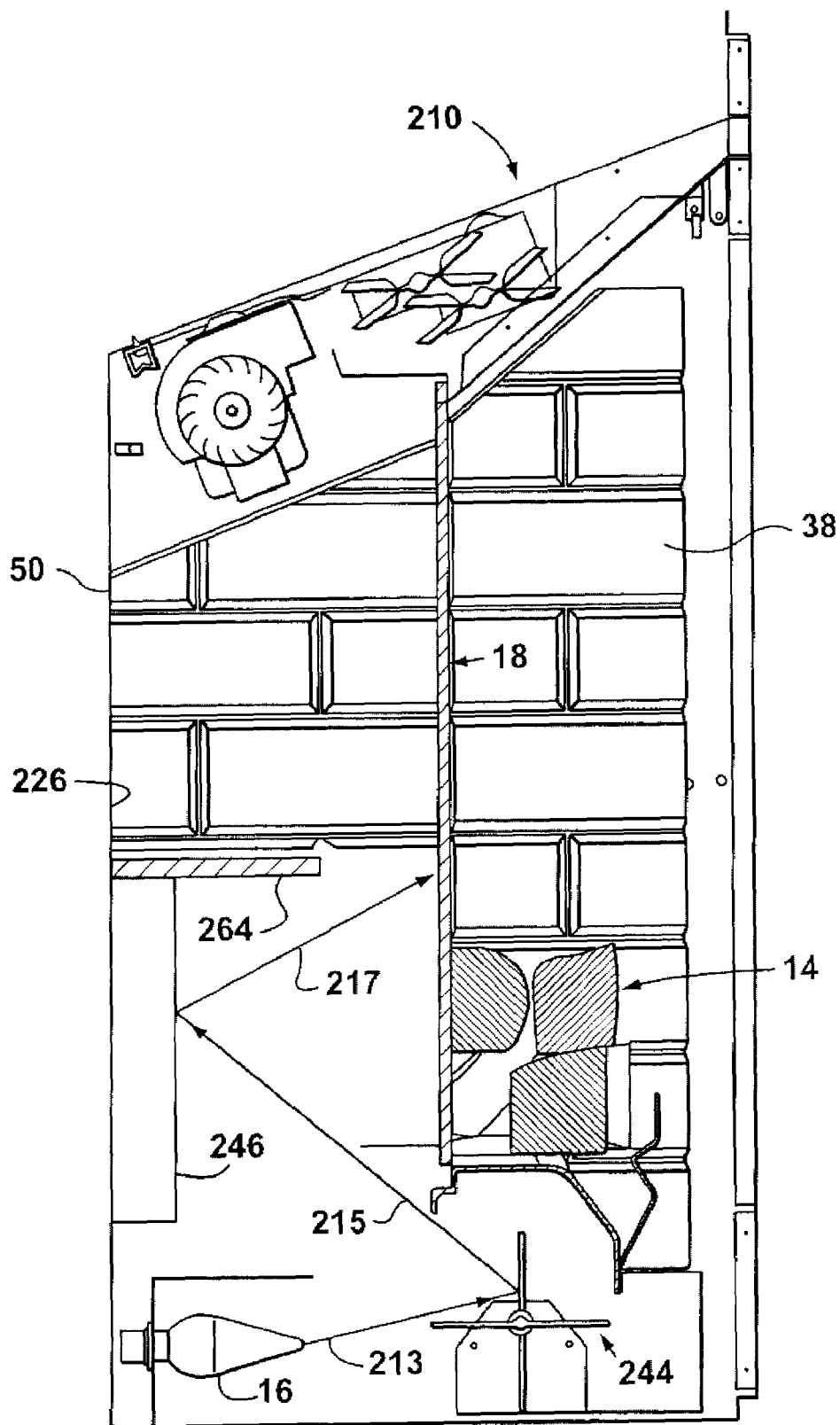


FIG. 3A

**FIG. 3B**

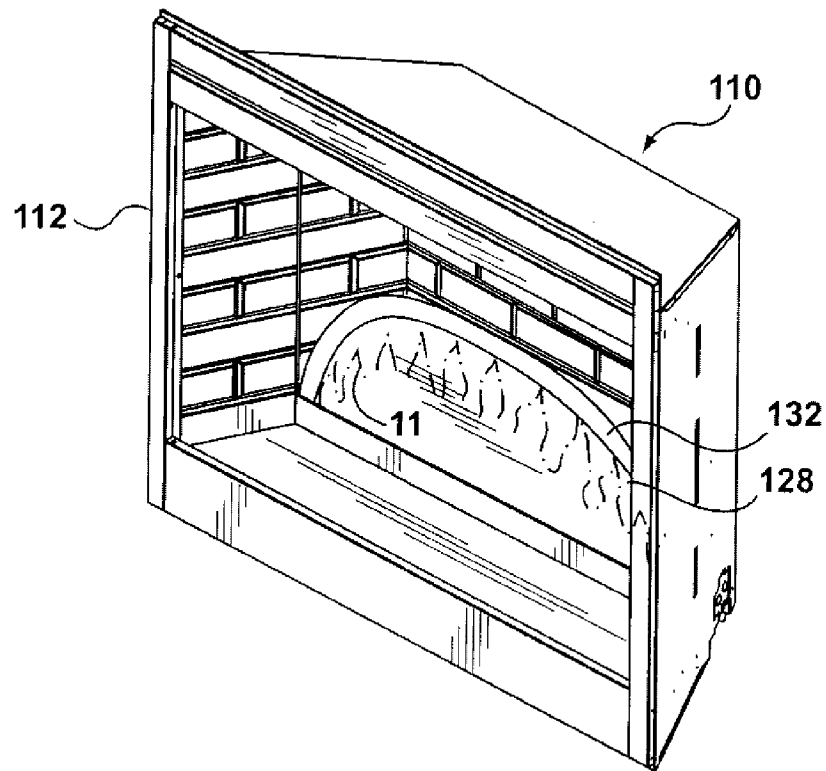


FIG. 4

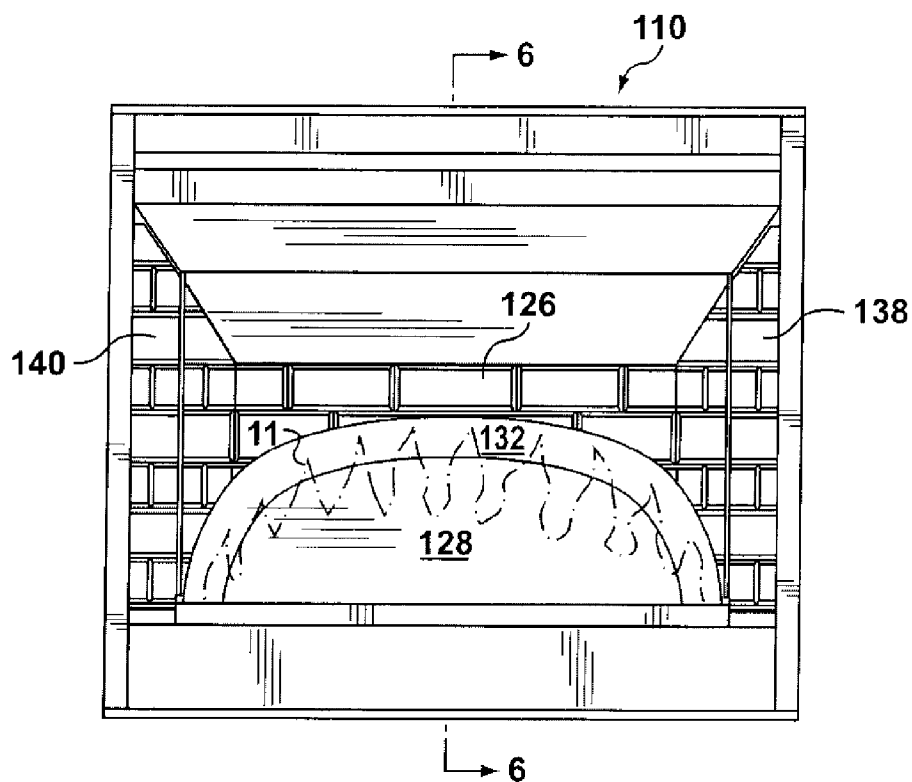


FIG. 5

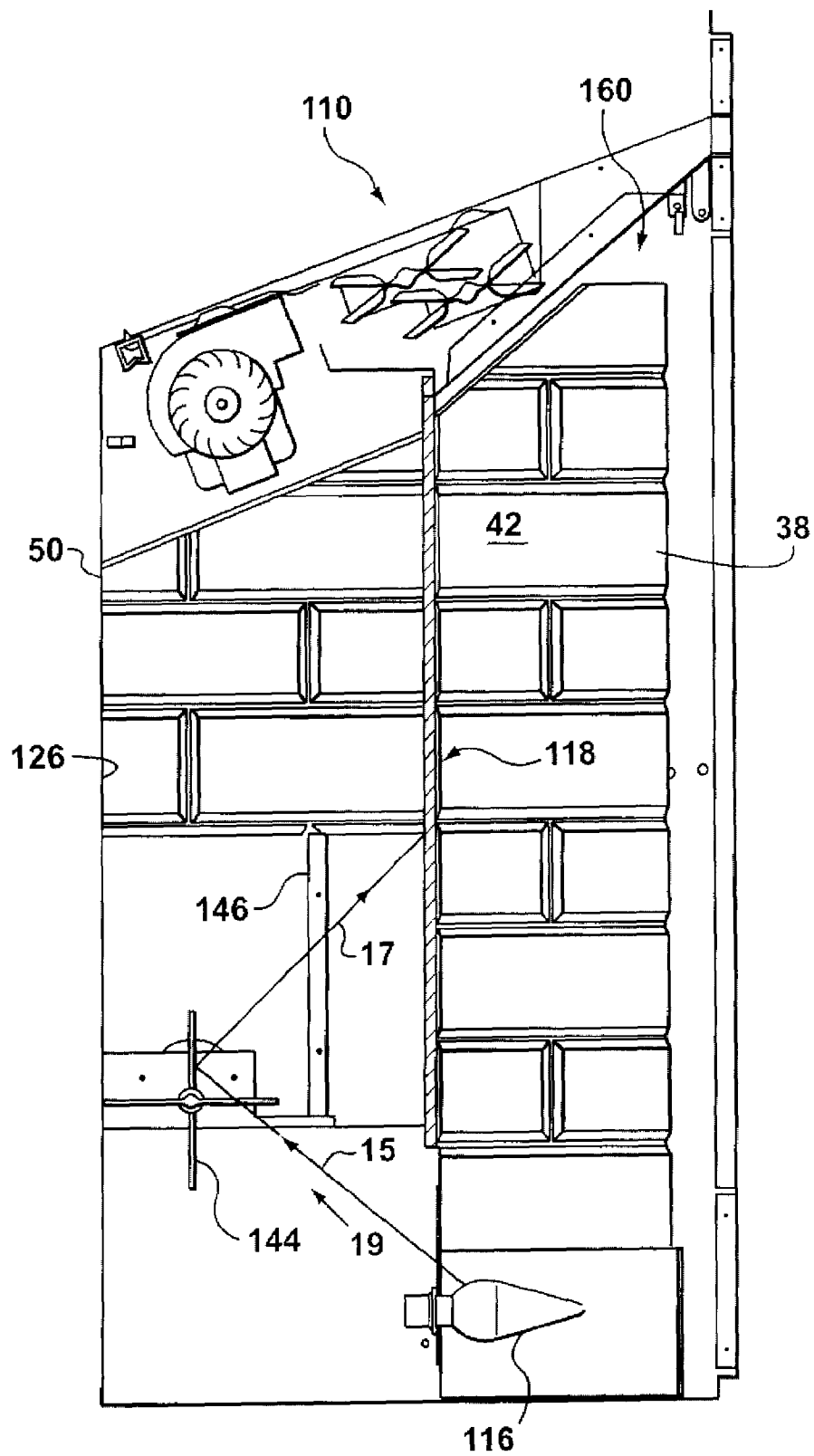


FIG. 6A

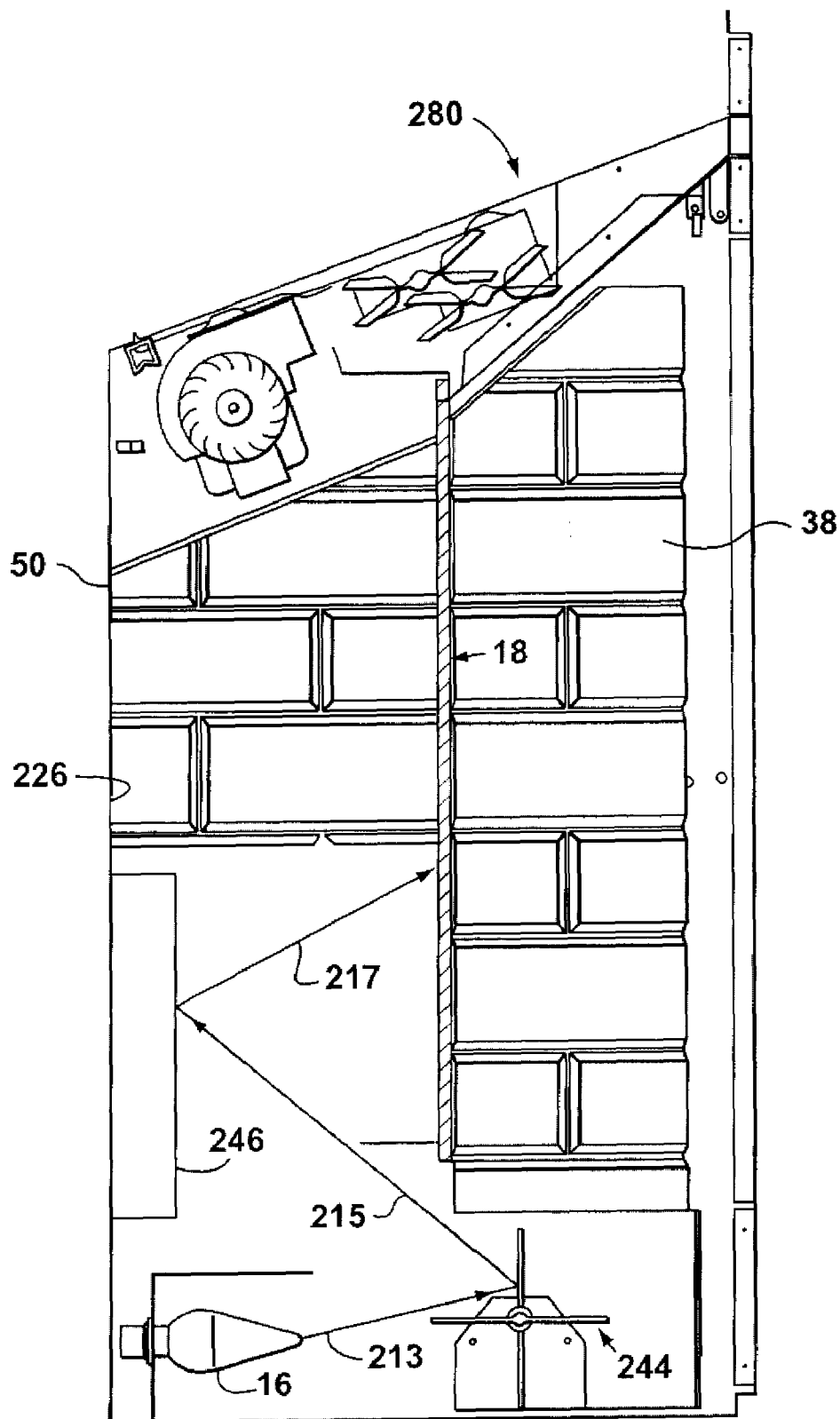


FIG. 6B

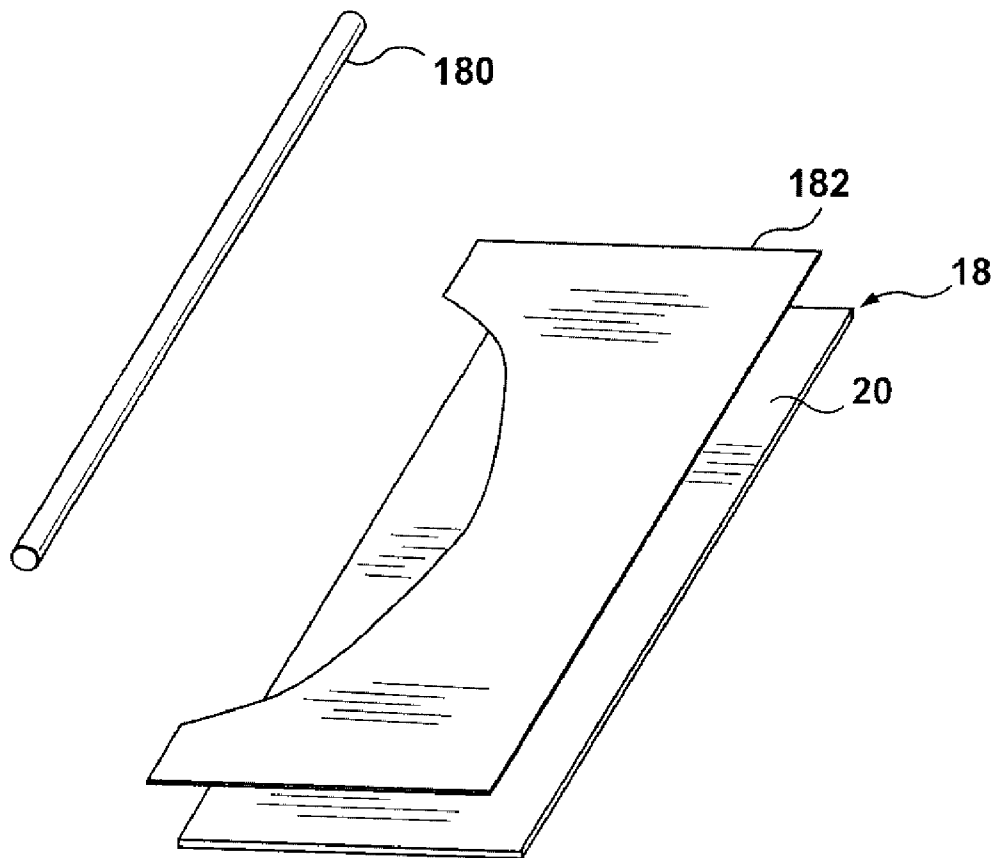


FIG. 7

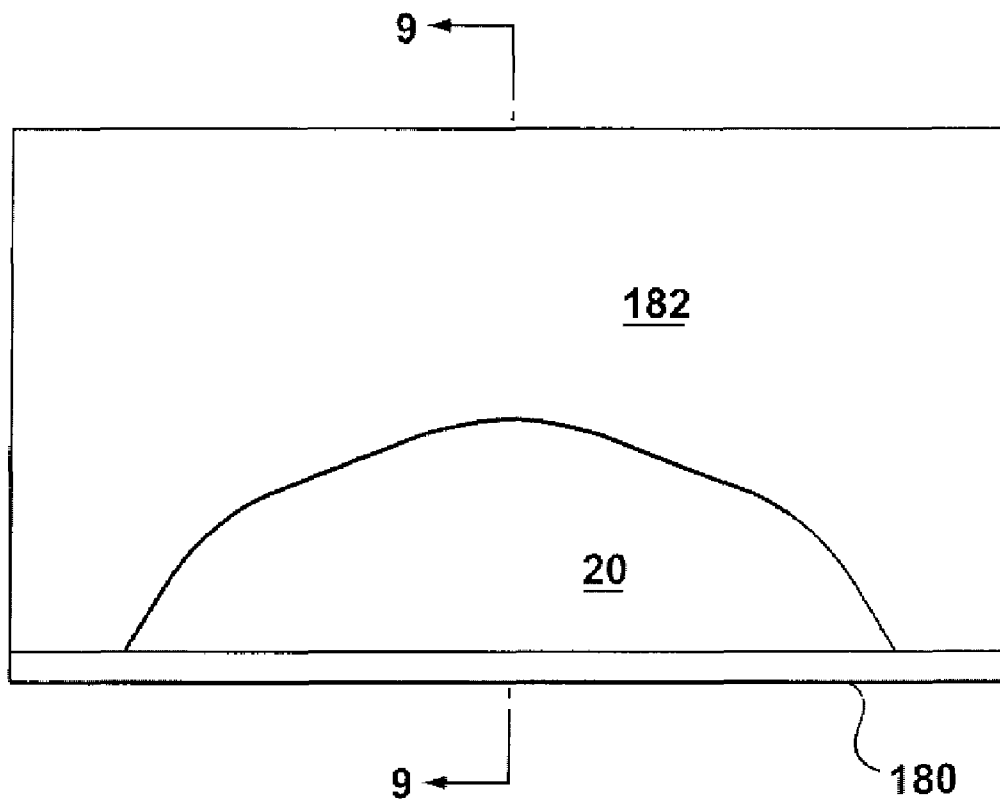


FIG. 8

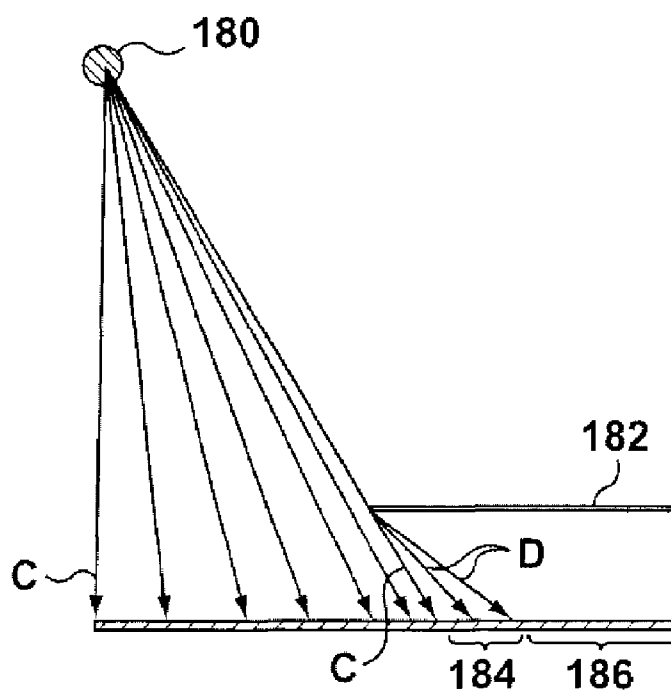


FIG. 9

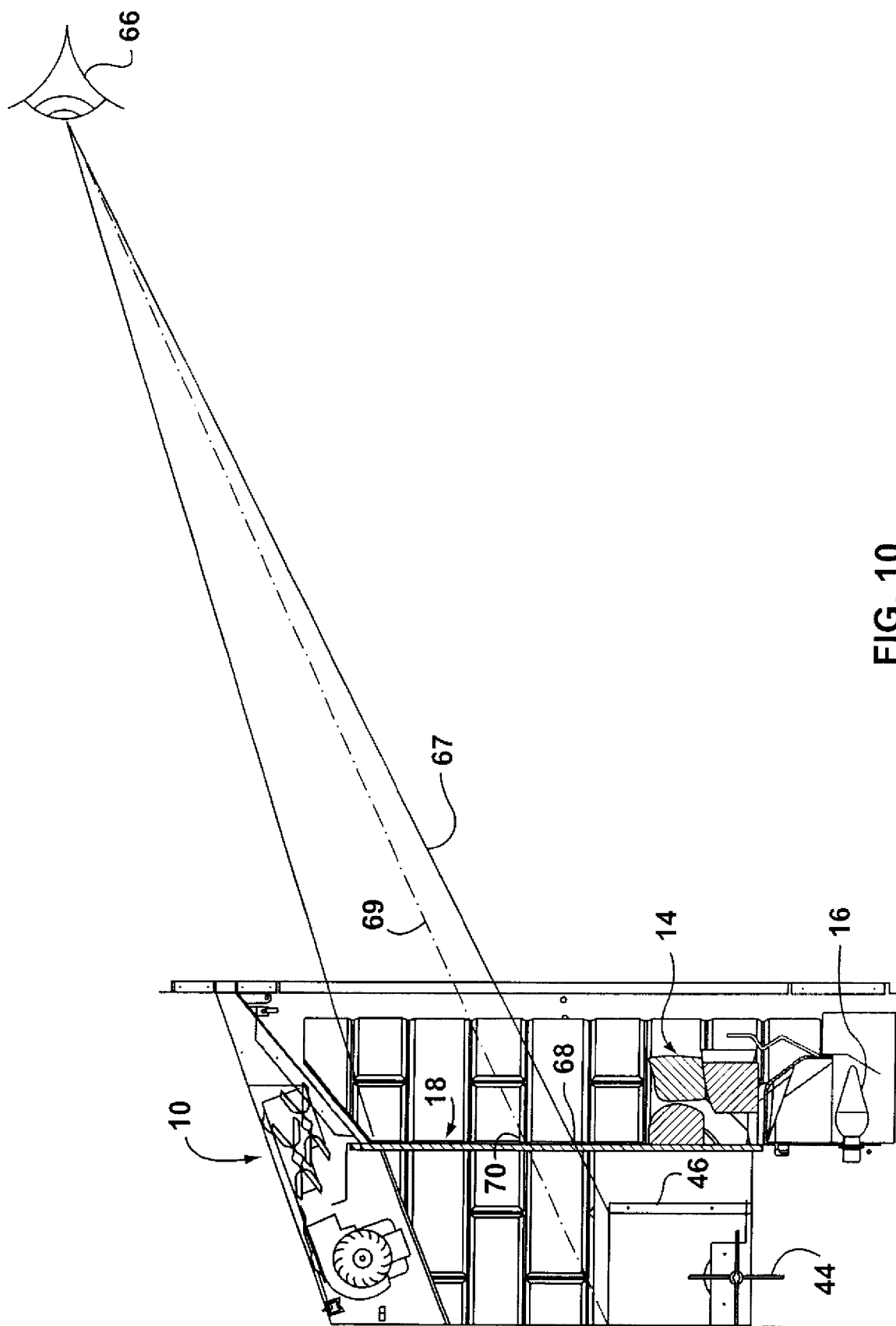


FIG. 10

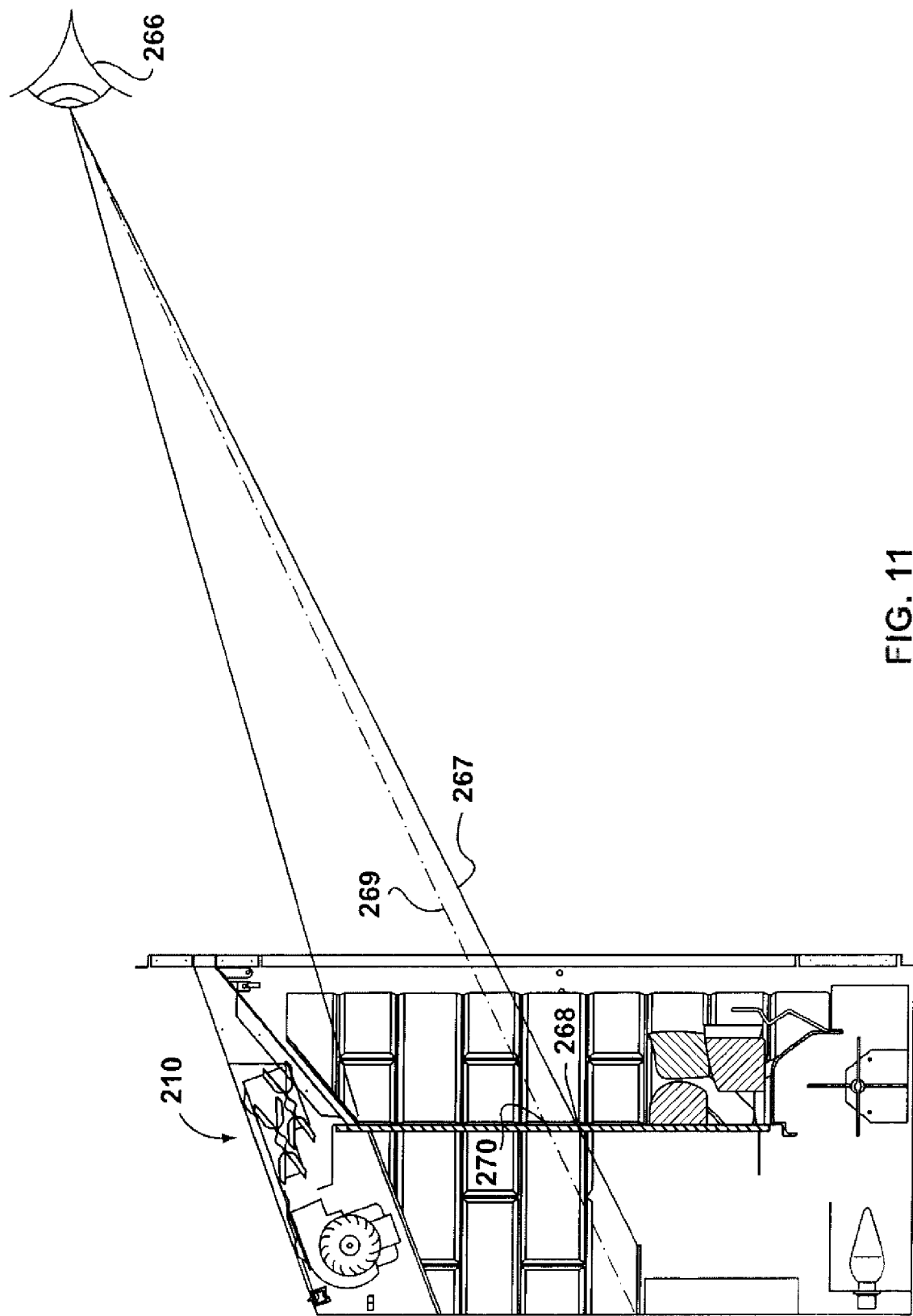


FIG. 11

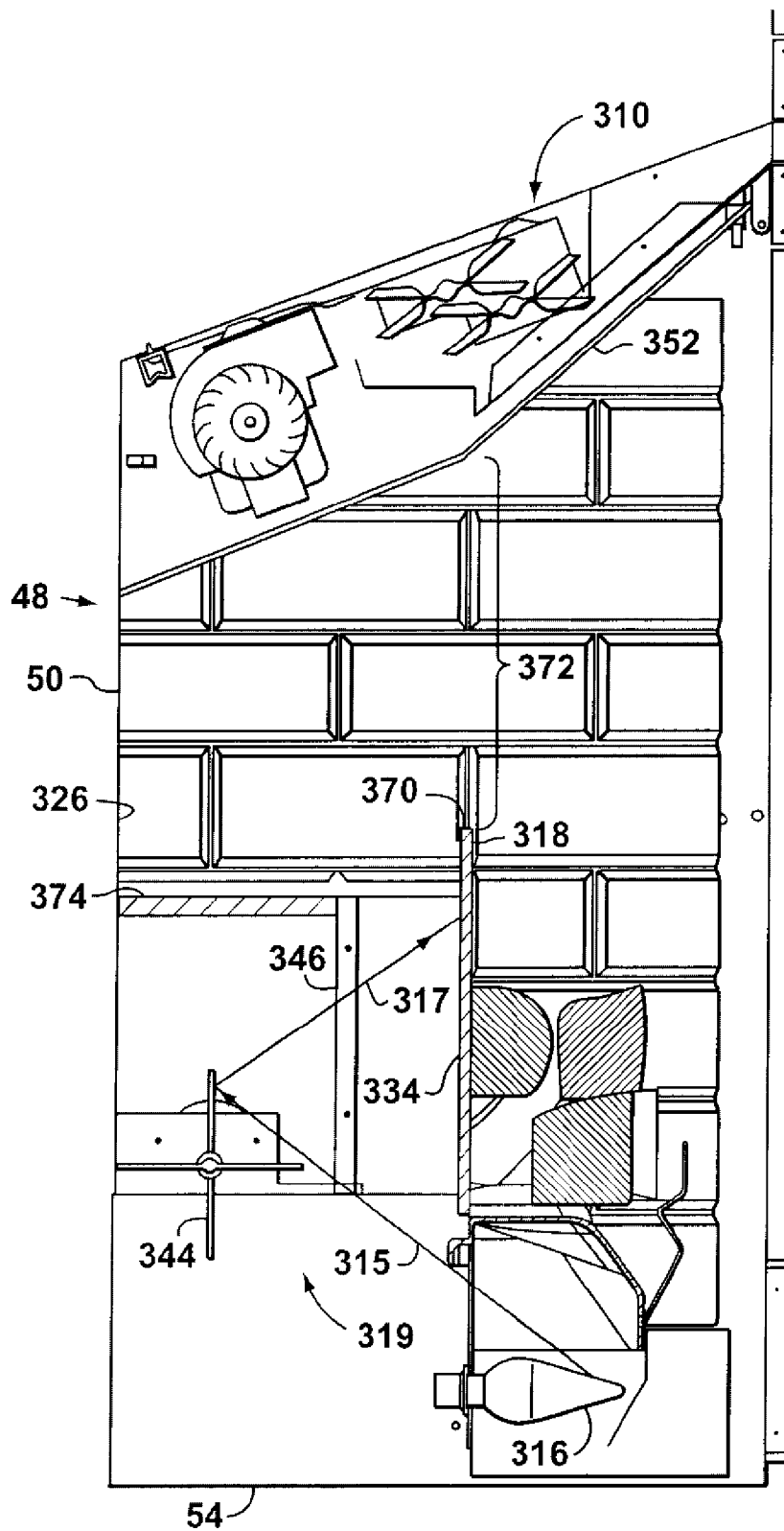


FIG. 12

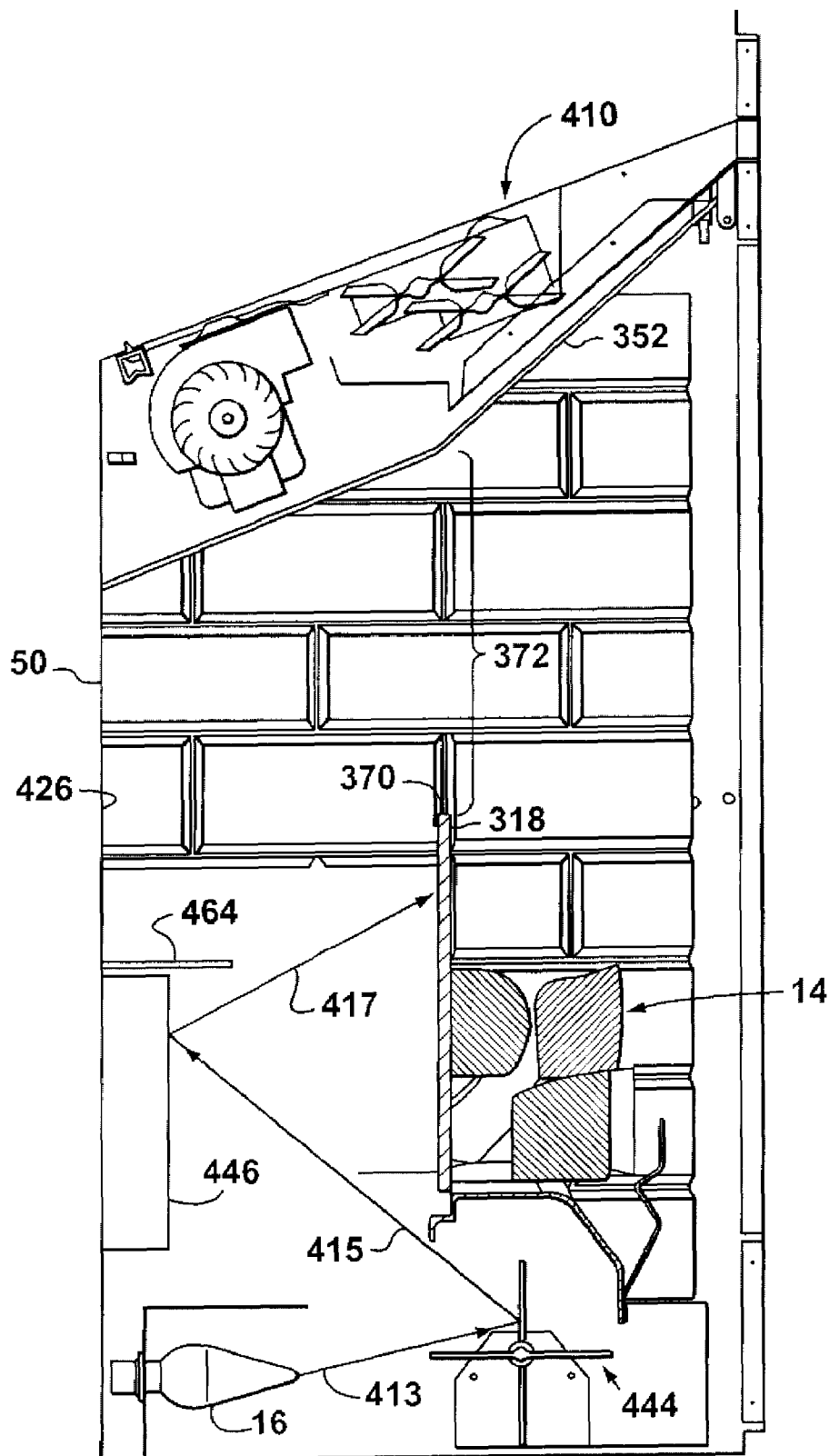


FIG. 13

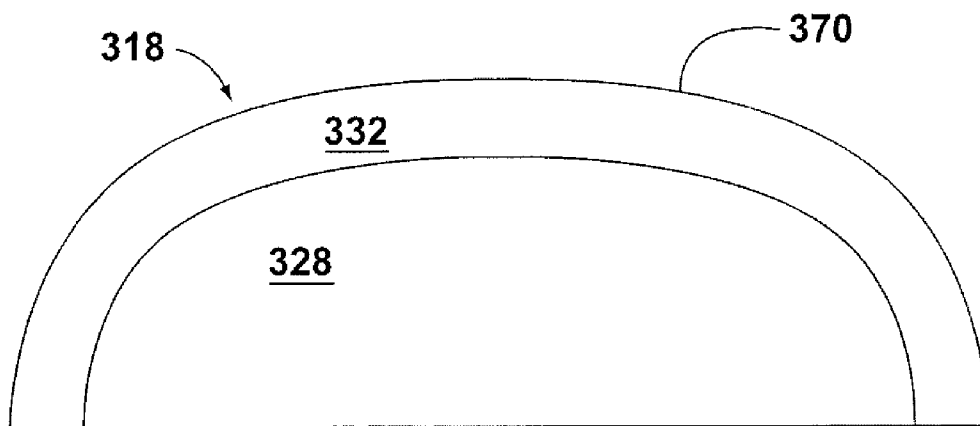


FIG. 14

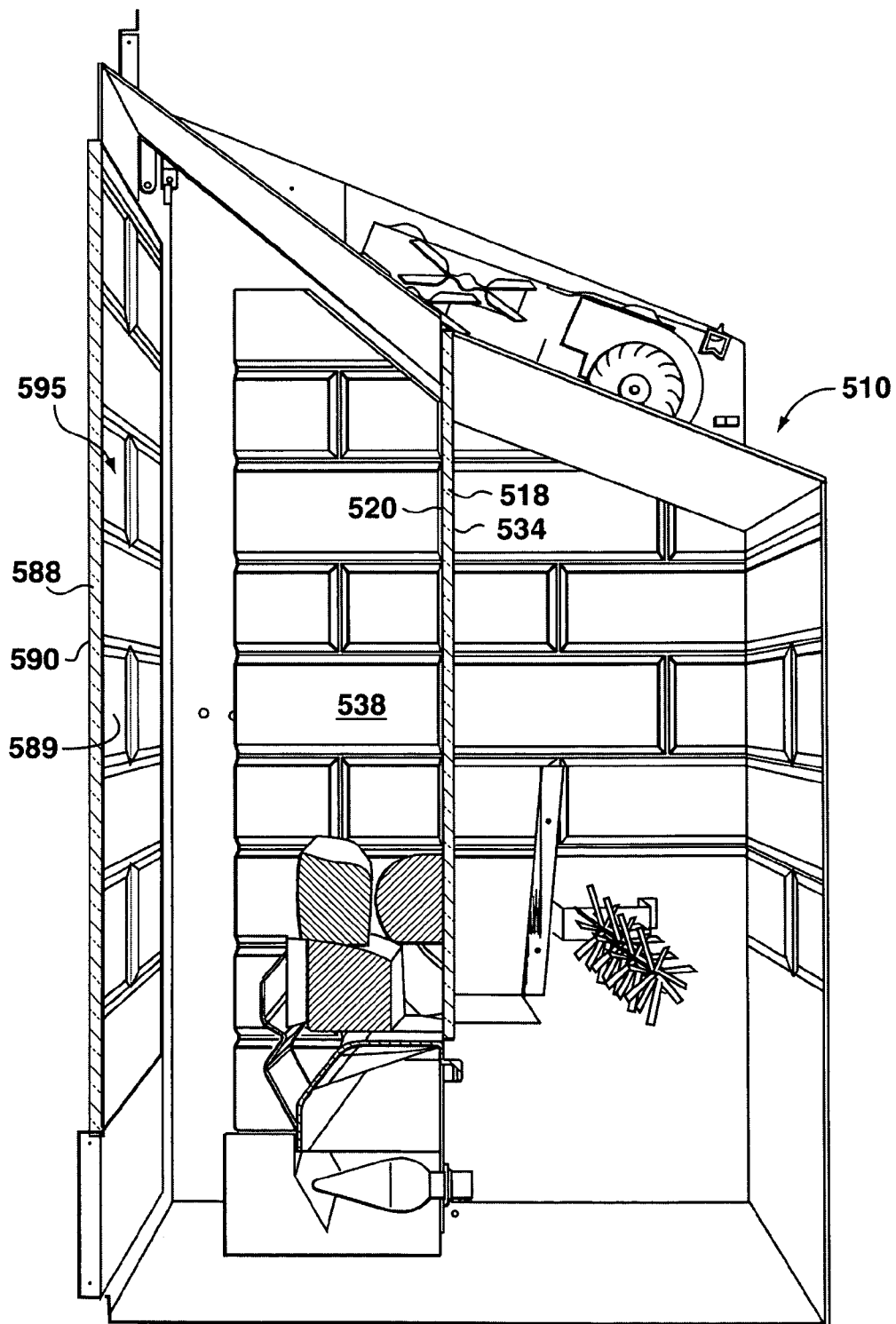
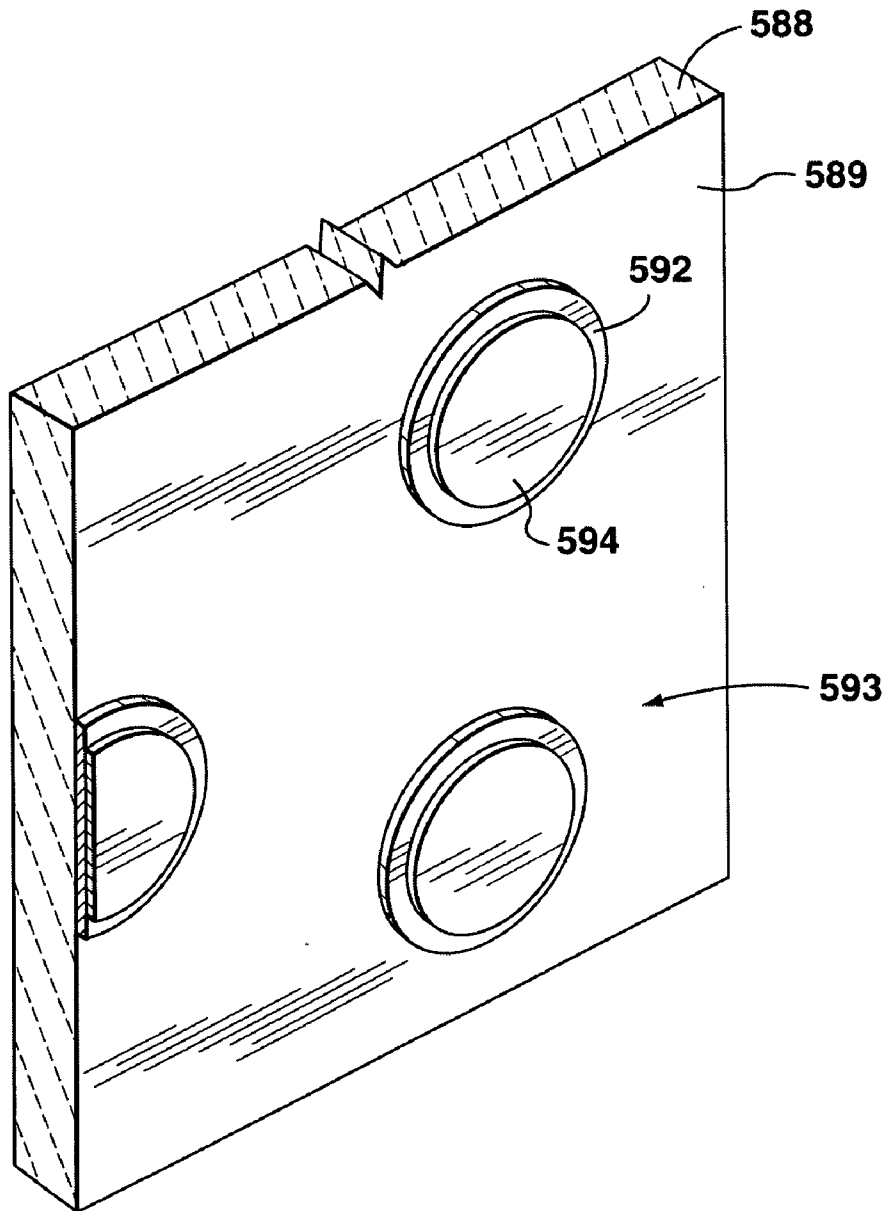


FIG. 15

**FIG. 16**

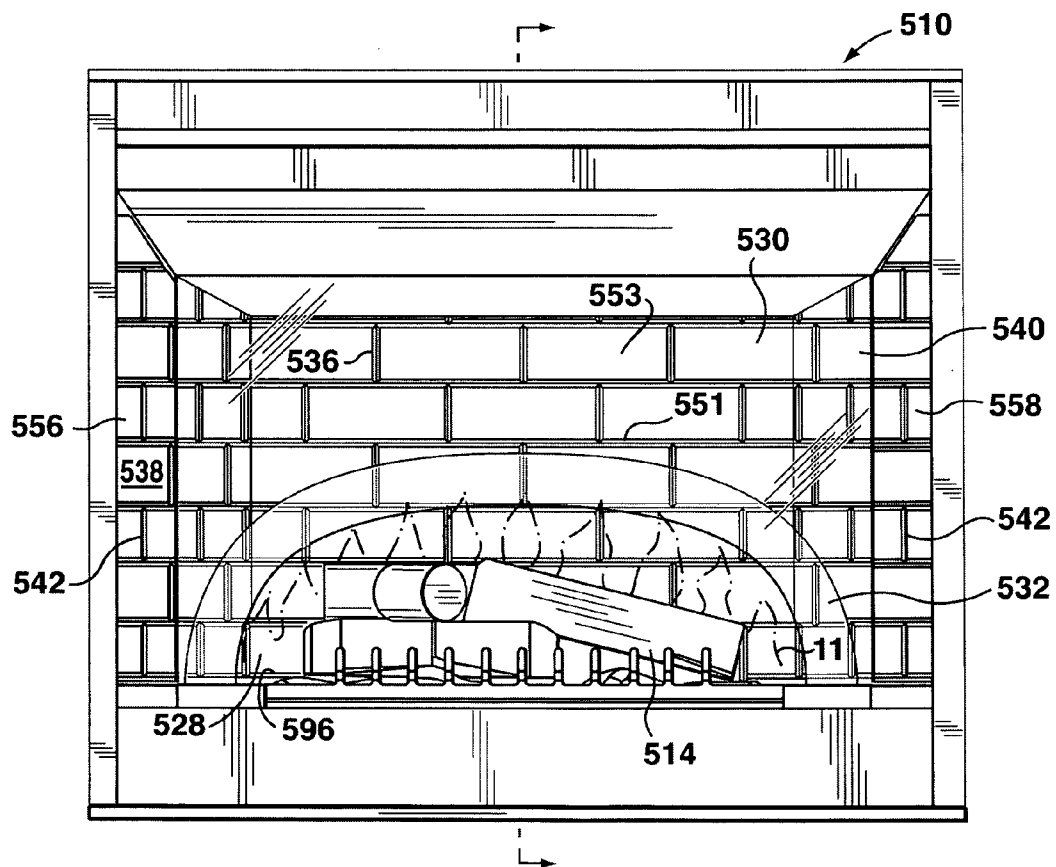


FIG. 17

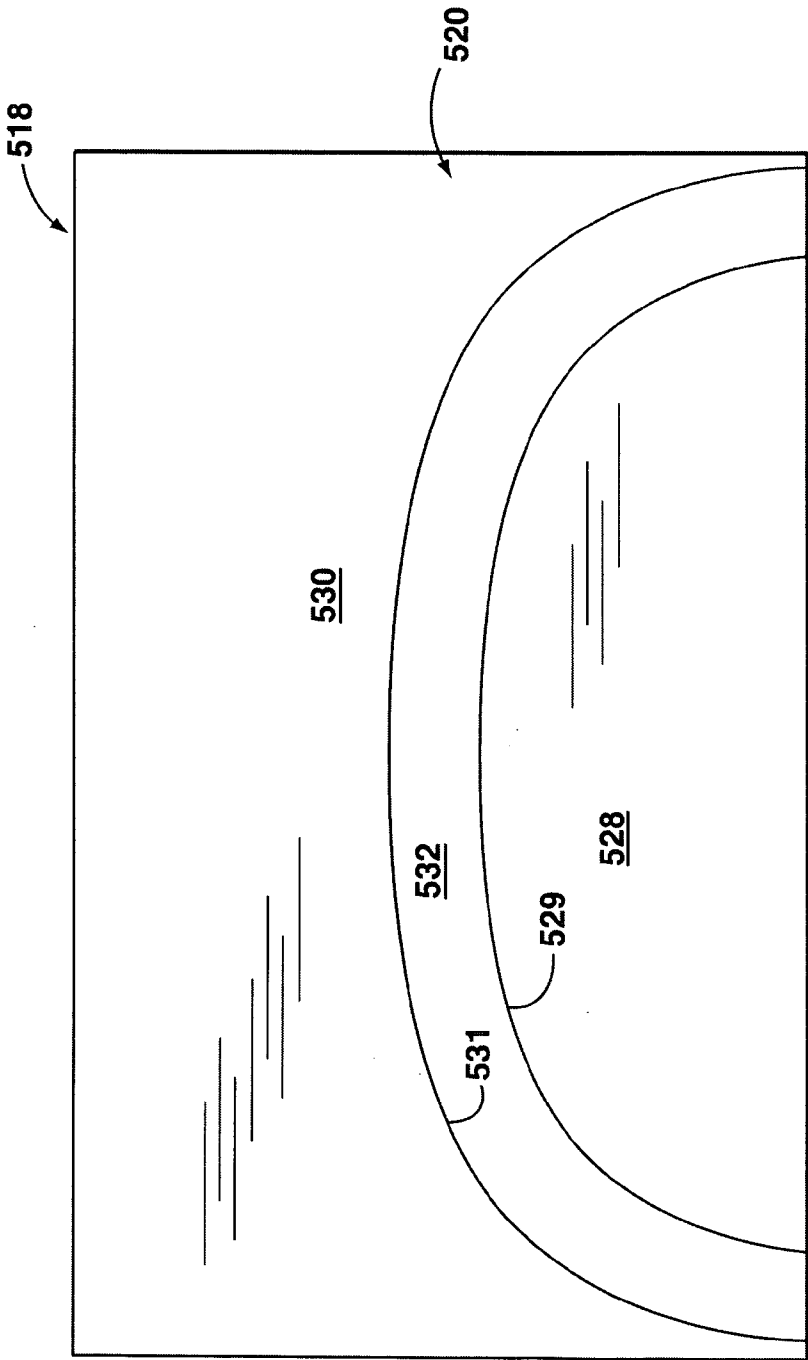


FIG. 18

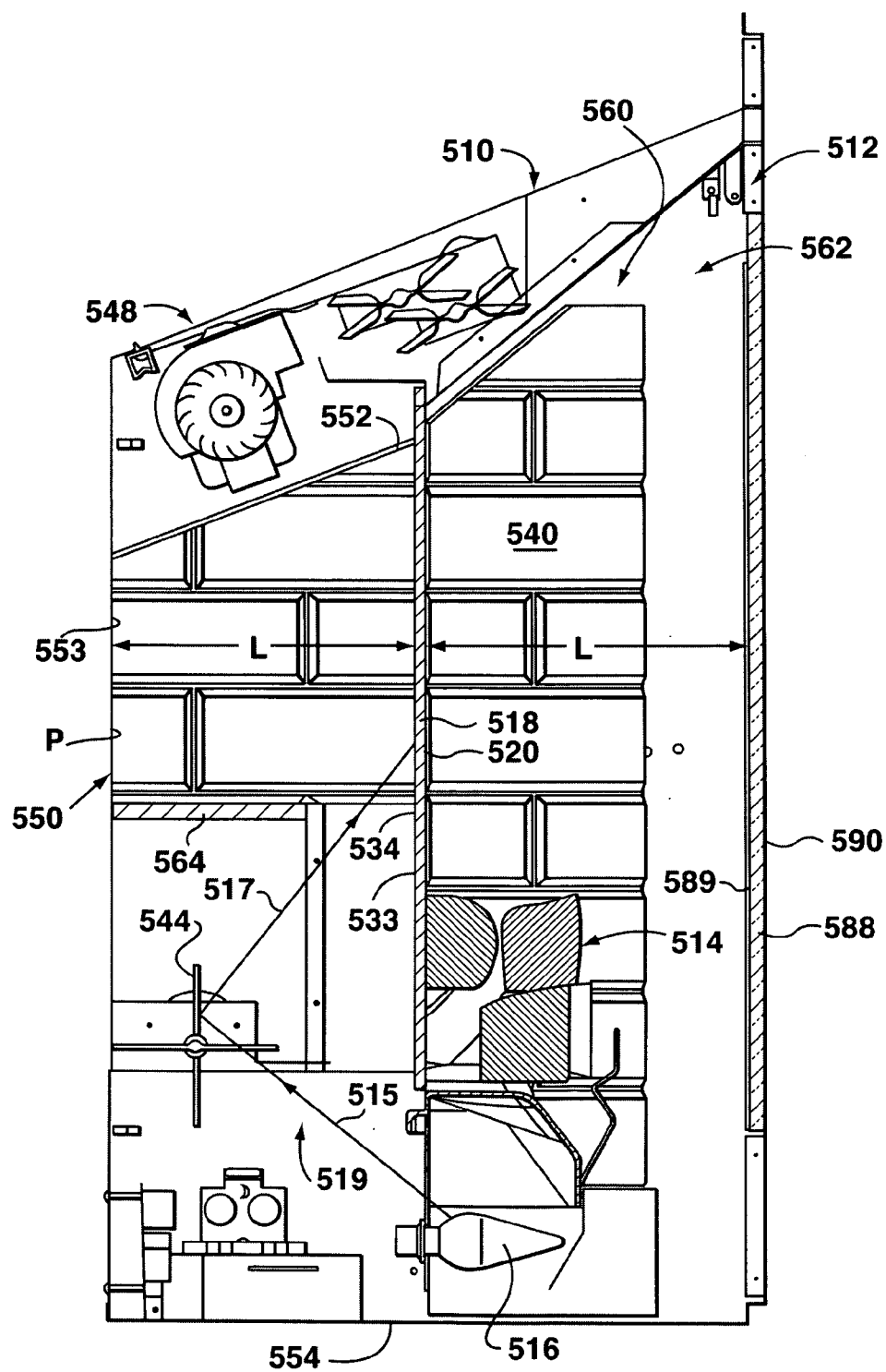


FIG. 19

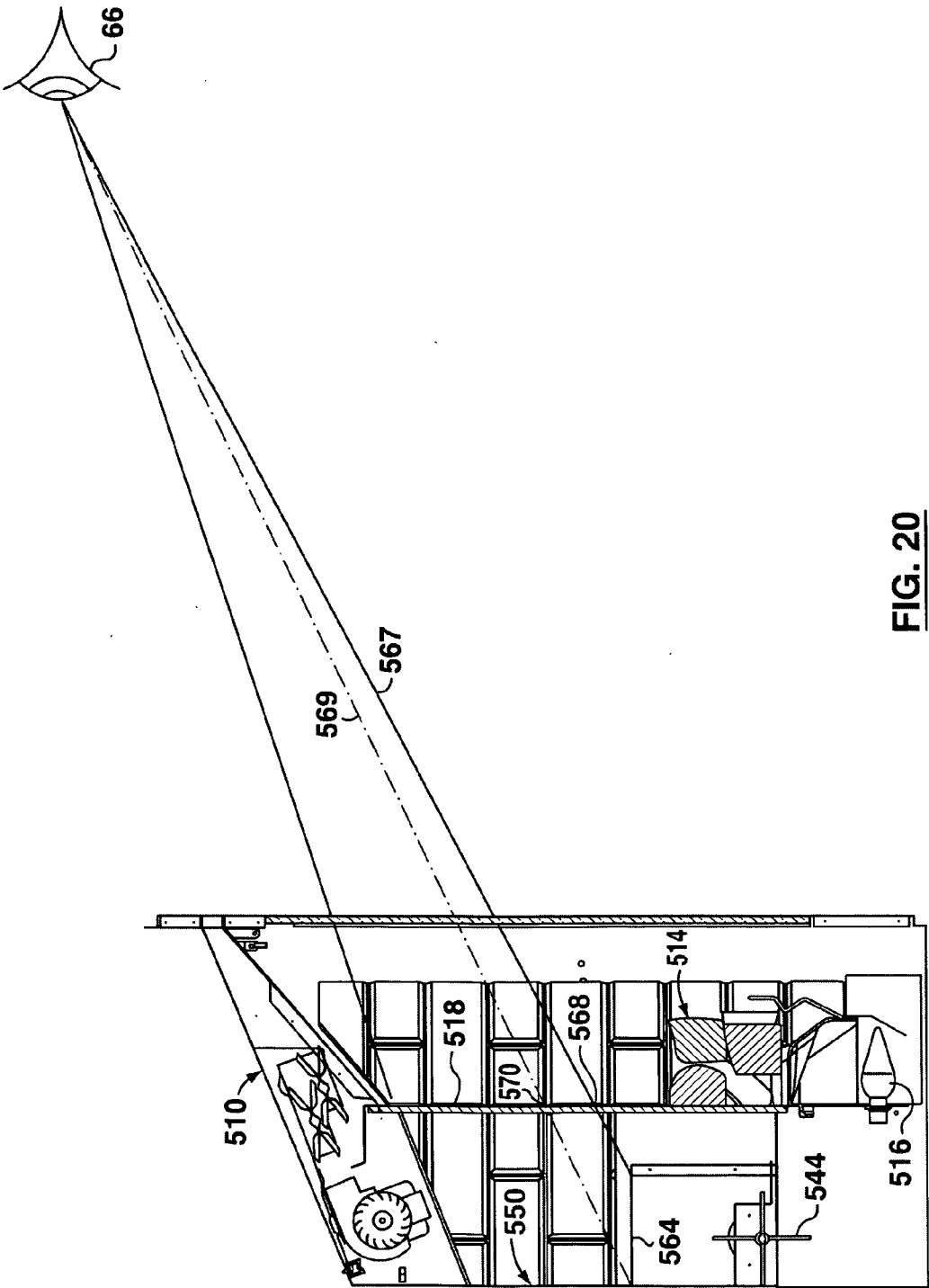


FIG. 20

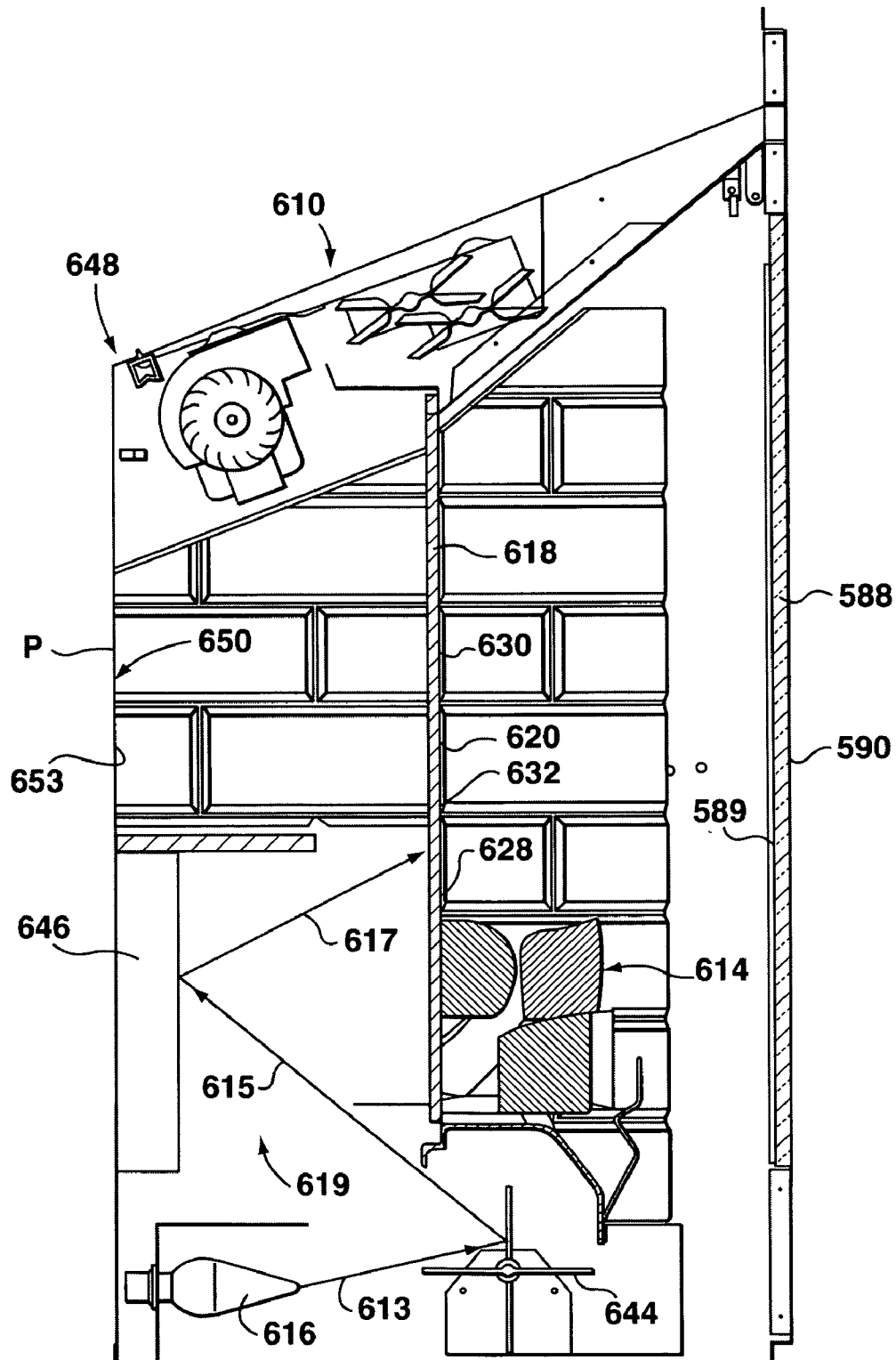


FIG. 21

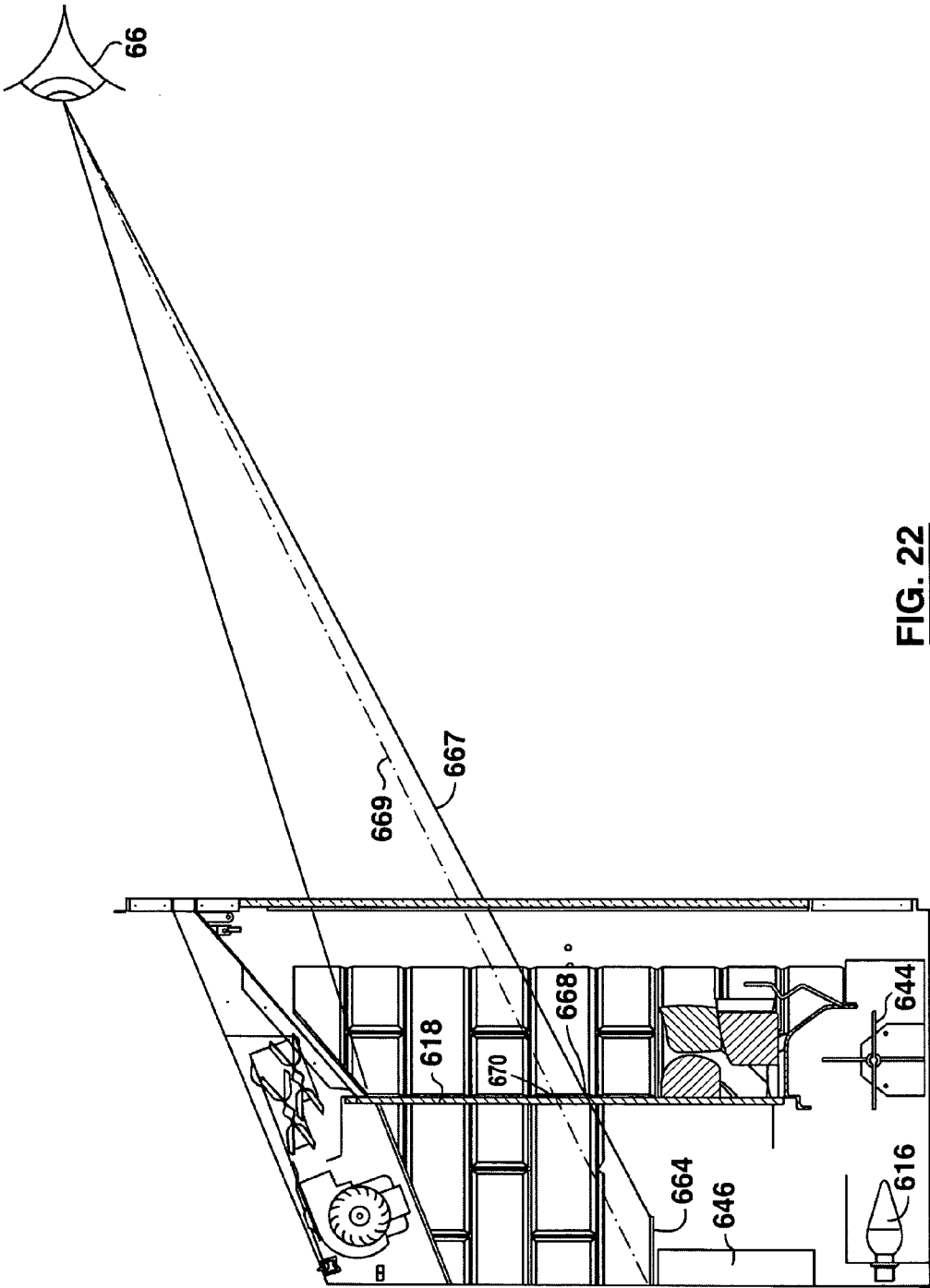


FIG. 22

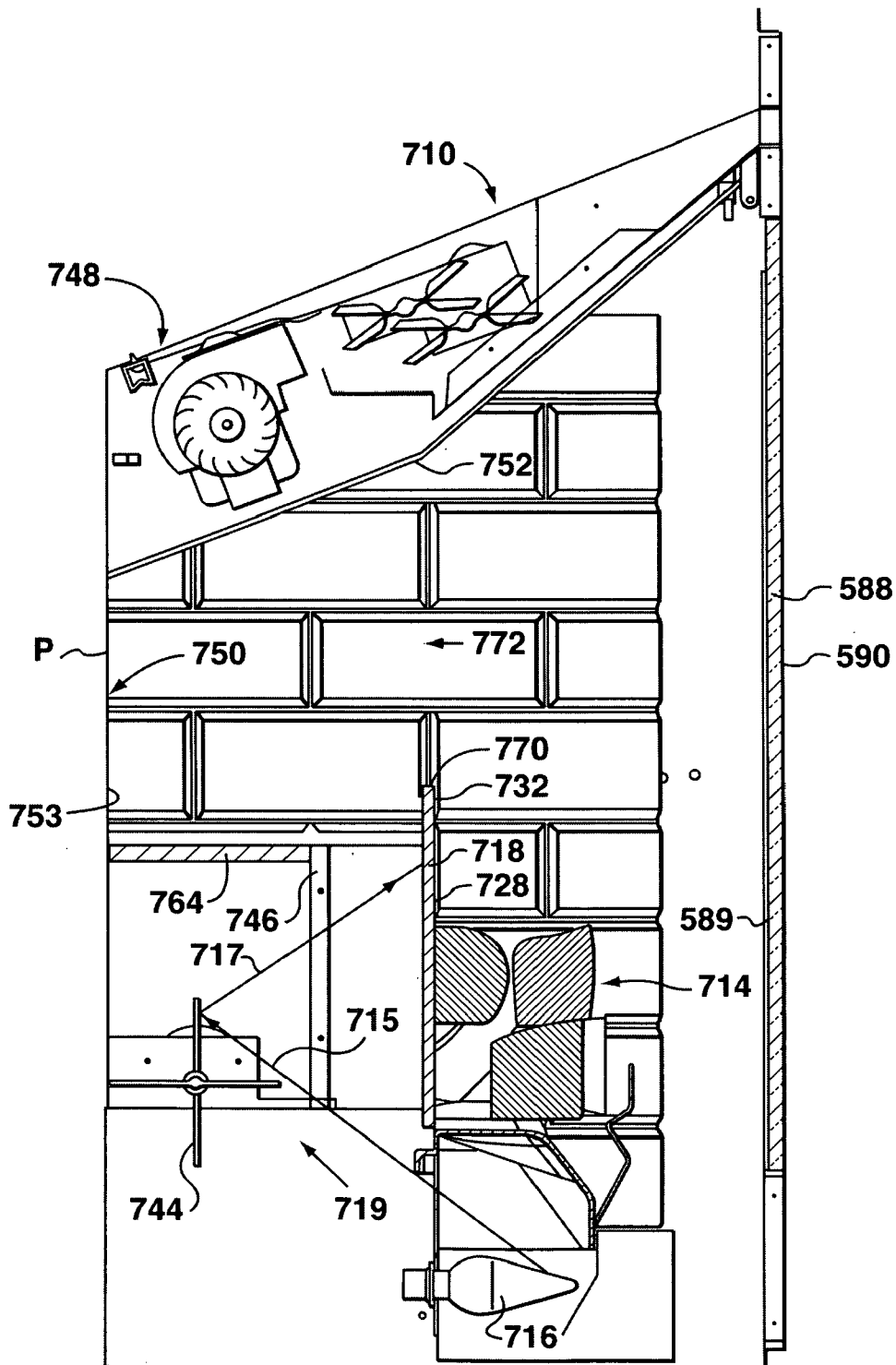


FIG. 23

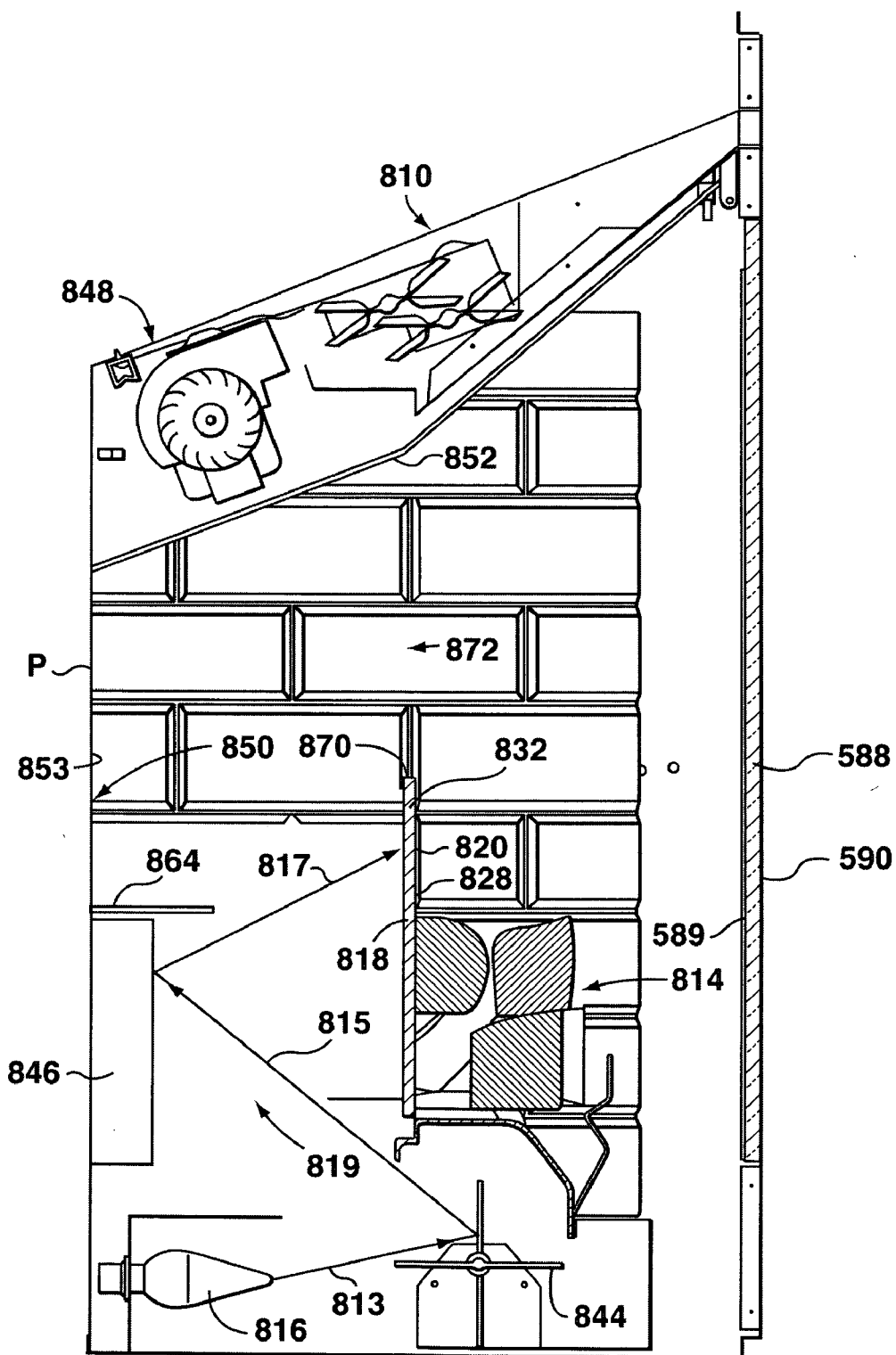
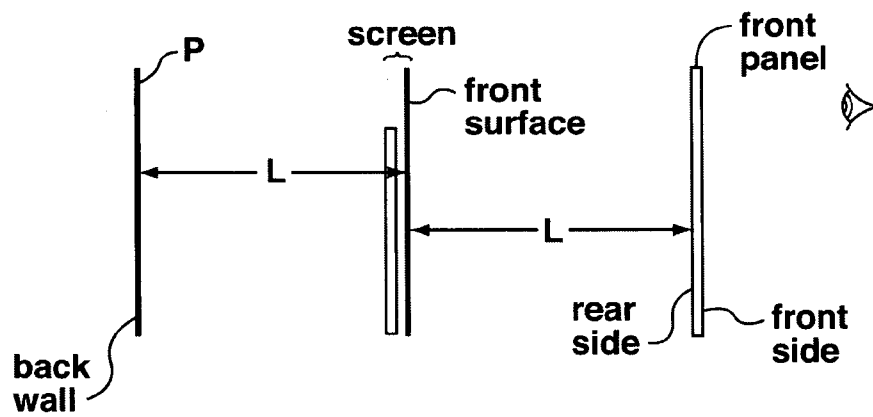


FIG. 24

**FIG. 25**

1

FLAME SIMULATING ASSEMBLY

This application is a continuation-in-part of prior application Ser. No. 10/759,143, filed Jan. 20, 2004.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a flame simulating assembly adapted for displaying an image of flames.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Various types of flame simulating assemblies are known. Often, a flame simulating assembly is designed to be included in an electric fireplace, to simulate a fire in a real fireplace. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 4,965,707 (Butterfield) discloses a simulated flame system for an electric fireplace in which a light source is combined with billowing ribbons to simulate flames. The effect resulting tends to resemble flames from a coal fuel source more than flames from a wood fuel source. The flames for burning wooden logs tend to be more active and extend higher above the fuel source.

Known flame simulating assemblies have certain advantages over actual fireplaces, in which a combustible fuel (usually wood or coal, or natural gas) can be burned. Among other things, electric flame simulating assemblies can be used in an interior room (such as in a condominium building or a hotel) from which access to a chimney (i.e., for an actual fireplace) would be difficult. Also, and in particular, known flame simulating assemblies usually occupy less space than actual fireplaces.

The relatively narrow configurations of known flame simulating assemblies is one of their advantages, as noted above. However, known flame simulating assemblies typically have somewhat less depth (i.e., distance from front to back) than ordinary fireplaces. Due to this, the overall effect presented by these flame simulating assemblies is often not as realistic as may be desirable. This is because the relatively smaller depth of the typical flame simulating assembly, as compared to the usual depth of a real fireplace, tends to undermine the overall simulation effect sought with the typical flame simulating assembly.

There is therefore a need for an improved flame simulating assembly adapted for displaying an image of flames.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In a broad aspect of the present invention, there is provided an assembly including a substantially transparent front panel having a rear side and a front side opposed thereto and a partially translucent screen with a partially reflective front surface and a rear surface opposed thereto. The front surface is positioned to face the rear side of the front panel and spaced apart therefrom by a predetermined distance. The front surface of the screen is positioned substantially parallel to the rear side of the front panel. The assembly also includes a plurality of first dots disposed on the front panel in a sufficiently consistent density over a given area to produce a substantially uniform tinted appearance to the front panel when observed through the front side. In addition, the assembly includes a plurality of second dots disposed on the first dots and facing the front surface of the screen. The second dots are smaller than the first dots. The second dots define a first image for reflection by at least part of the front surface of the screen to provide a virtual image of the first image. The assembly also includes a back wall positioned behind the screen and displaying a second image on an exposed surface

2

thereof facing the rear surface of the screen. The exposed surface is spaced apart from the front surface of the screen by the predetermined distance. Also, the exposed surface substantially defines a plane. The exposed surface of the back wall is positioned substantially parallel to the front surface of the screen. In addition, the second image is at least partially observable through the front side of the front panel. The virtual image is located substantially in the plane of the exposed surface, so that the virtual image appears to be positioned behind the screen.

In another aspect, the virtual image and the second image are substantially aligned (or congruent) with each other so that the virtual image and the second image appear to be substantially continuous relative to each other.

In another of its aspects, the assembly additionally includes a housing in which the screen is disposed, and the screen includes a top edge spaced apart from a top wall of the housing to define an upper opening so that the exposed surface is at least partially observable through the front side of the front panel and the upper opening.

In yet another aspect, the assembly additionally includes a flame image subassembly for providing one or more images of flames, and a simulated fuel bed positioned in front of the front surface of the screen. Also, the front surface includes a viewing region disposed proximate to the simulated fuel bed through which the image of flames is transmittable, and an observation region disposed distal to the simulated fuel bed. The observation region is adapted to permit at least partial observation of the back wall from the front side of the front panel.

In yet another of its aspects, the flame image subassembly includes a light source and a flicker element positioned in a path of light from the light source to the screen. The flicker element is for causing light from the light source to flicker (or fluctuate), like flickering (or fluctuating) light in a fire. The flame image subassembly also includes a flame effect element positioned in the path of light, for configuring light from the light source to form the images of flames.

In another aspect, the front surface of the screen includes a transition region disposed between the observation region and the viewing region. The exposed surface of the back wall is at least partially observable through the transition region.

In another of its aspects, the invention provides a flame simulating assembly for providing one or more images of flames. The flame simulating assembly includes a housing having a back wall with a substantially planar exposed surface, the housing defining a cavity open at a front end of the housing. A screen is disposed in the cavity and in front of the back wall. The screen has a front surface adapted for transmitting the images of flames therethrough. The front surface is at least partially reflective and positioned substantially parallel to the exposed surface of the back wall. The assembly also includes a flame image subassembly for providing the images of flames. A substantially transparent front panel is disposed substantially at the front end of the housing and has a front side and an opposed rear side thereof. The rear side of the front panel faces the front surface of the screen, and is spaced a predetermined distance apart from the front surface of the screen. In addition, the rear side of the front panel is positioned substantially parallel to the front surface of the screen. The front panel includes a plurality of first dots disposed on the front panel in a sufficiently constant density over a given area to produce a substantially uniform tinted appearance to the front panel when observed through the front side, and a plurality of second dots disposed on the first dots and facing the front surface of the screen. A first image is defined by the second dots. The first image is substantially invisible

3

when observed through the front side other than as a virtual image thereof reflected by the front surface of the screen. Also, the exposed surface of the back wall displays a second image at least partially observable through the front side of the front panel, the exposed surface being spaced apart from the front surface of the screen by the predetermined distance. The virtual image is located substantially in the plane of the exposed surface so that the virtual image appears to be positioned behind the screen.

In another aspect, the first image and the second image are representations of a firebrick wall which are positioned so that the virtual image and the second image are substantially aligned with each other.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will be better understood with reference to the drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is an isometric view of a preferred embodiment of the flame simulating assembly including a simulated fuel bed and a screen positioned behind the simulated fuel bed;

FIG. 2A is a front view of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 1;

FIG. 2B is a front view of the screen;

FIG. 2C is a back view of the screen;

FIG. 3A is a cross section of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 1 taken along line 3-3 in FIG. 2A, drawn at a larger scale;

FIG. 3B is a cross section of an alternative embodiment of the flame simulating assembly of the invention;

FIG. 4 is an isometric view of another embodiment of the flame simulating assembly of the invention, drawn at a smaller scale;

FIG. 5 is a front view of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 4;

FIG. 6A is a cross section of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 4 taken along line 6-6 in FIG. 5, drawn at a larger scale;

FIG. 6B is a cross section of another alternative embodiment of the flame simulating assembly of the invention;

FIG. 7 is an isometric view of a screen having a front surface, with a mask element and a source of vaporized metal positioned relative to each other and to the front surface;

FIG. 8 is a front view of the screen, the mask element, and the source of FIG. 7, drawn at a larger scale; and

FIG. 9 is a cross section of the screen, the mask element, and the source of FIG. 8 taken along line 8-8 in FIG. 7;

FIG. 10 is a cross section of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 3A, drawn at a smaller scale;

FIG. 11 is a cross section of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 3B;

FIG. 12 is a cross section of an alternative embodiment of the flame simulating assembly including an alternative embodiment of the screen, drawn at a larger scale;

FIG. 13 is a cross section of another alternative embodiment of the flame simulating assembly including the alternative embodiment of the screen in the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 12;

FIG. 14 is a front view of the alternative embodiment of the screen of FIGS. 12 and 13, drawn at a larger scale;

FIG. 15 is an isometric view of another embodiment of the flame simulating assembly of the invention;

FIG. 16 is an enlarged isometric view of an inner surface of a front wall of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 15;

FIG. 17 is a front view of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 15;

4

FIG. 18 is a front view of an embodiment of a screen included in the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 17, drawn at a larger scale;

FIG. 19 is a cross-section of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 15, drawn at a smaller scale;

FIG. 20 is another cross-section of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 15, drawn at a smaller scale;

FIG. 21 is a cross-section of an alternative embodiment of the flame simulating assembly of the invention, drawn at a larger scale;

FIG. 22 is another cross-section of the flame simulating assembly of FIG. 21 drawn at a smaller scale;

FIG. 23 is a cross-section of another alternative embodiment of the flame simulating assembly of the invention, drawn at a larger scale;

FIG. 24 is a cross-section of another alternative embodiment of the flame simulating assembly of the invention; and

FIG. 25 is a schematic illustration showing the relationship between certain components of the flame simulating assembly of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT(S)

Reference is first made to FIGS. 1, 2A, 2B, 2C and 3A to describe a preferred embodiment of a flame simulating assembly indicated generally by the numeral 10 in accordance with the invention. The flame simulating assembly 10 is for providing one or more images of flames 11 (FIGS. 1, 2A). Preferably, the flame simulating assembly 10 includes one or more light sources 16 for producing the images of flames 11, and a screen 18 positioned in a path of light 19 (schematically represented by arrows 15, 17 in FIG. 3A) from the light source. As can be seen in FIG. 3A, the screen 18 has a front surface 20. The screen 18 is adapted to transmit the images of flames 11 through the front surface 20. Preferably, the flame simulating assembly 10 also includes a simulated interior fireplace wall 26 which is positioned behind the screen 18, as can be seen in FIGS. 1, 2A, and 3A. In the preferred embodiment, the front surface 20 of the screen 18 includes an observation region 30 (FIGS. 2A, 2B). The observation region 30 is adapted to permit observation of at least part of the simulated interior fireplace wall 26. The front surface 20 of the screen 18 also includes a viewing region 28 (FIGS. 1, 2A, 2B).

For clarity, an image of flames 11 is illustrated in FIGS. 1, 2A, 4, and 5 in ghost outline. It will be understood that the image of flames is constantly changing (in shape and intensity of light, and color) while the flame simulating assembly 10 is operating.

As can be seen in FIGS. 1, 2A, and 3A, the flame simulating assembly 10 preferably includes a simulated fuel bed 14 which is positioned adjacent to the viewing region 28. In the preferred embodiment, the images of flames 11 are transmitted through the front surface 20 proximal to the simulated fuel bed 14, for a realistic flame simulation effect (FIGS. 1, 2A, 3A).

Preferably, the viewing region 28 is partially reflective. Because of this, the simulated fuel bed 14 is reflected in the viewing region 28 to an extent sufficient to provide an illusion of depth, as described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,642,580. U.S. Pat. No. 5,642,580 is hereby incorporated herein by reference. However, the images of flames 11 are also transmittable through the partially reflective viewing region 28. As can be seen in FIGS. 1 and 2A, the viewing region 28 is located proximal to the simulated fuel bed 14 so that, when images of flames 11 are transmitted through the screen 18, the images of

5

flames 11 appear to be rising from and out of the simulated fuel bed 14, similar to flames in a real fire. At the same time, the simulated interior fireplace wall 26 is observable through an observation region 30, thereby simulating a firebox in a real fireplace (not shown) in which wood or coal may be burned. The observation region 30 is preferably transparent or translucent, or at least partially transparent or translucent.

In the preferred embodiment, the front surface 20 of the screen 18 also includes a transition region 32 disposed between the viewing region 28 and the observation region 30. Preferably, the images of flames 11 are at least partially transmittable through the transition region 32, and the simulated interior fireplace wall 26 is also at least partially observable through the transition region 32. The transition region 32 is for providing a relatively gradual transition from the viewing region 28 to the observation region 30, in order to provide a more realistic overall simulation effect. Preferably, if the viewing region 28 is partially reflective, then the transition region 32 is also partially reflective, however, to a somewhat lesser extent. To achieve this, the transition region 32 is preferably less silvered relative to the viewing region 28, as will be described.

In the preferred embodiment, the screen 18 additionally includes a back surface 34 positioned opposite to the front surface 20. Preferably, the back surface 34 is adapted to diffuse light transmitted through the screen 18 to prevent an observer (not shown) from observing the light source 16, or other internal components of the flame simulating assembly 10. Such a back surface 34 is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,642,580. In the preferred embodiment of the flame simulating assembly 10, however, the back surface 34 of the screen 18 includes a diffusing portion 33 which is located substantially opposite to the viewing region 28 and the transition region 32 (FIG. 2C). The back surface 34 also includes a non-diffusing portion 35 which is located substantially opposite to the observation region 30 (FIG. 2C).

In the preferred embodiment, the diffusing portion 33 is divided into a first part 37, located opposite to the viewing region 28, and a second part 39, located opposite to the transition region 32. Preferably, the extent to which light is diffused by the second part 39 is somewhat less than the extent to which light is diffused by the first part 37. Because of this, the simulated interior fireplace wall 26 is at least partially observable through the transition region 32.

Preferably, the screen 18 is glass, plastic, or another other suitable material. In the preferred embodiment, the screen 18 is lightly silvered so that it is partially reflective, to provide a two-way mirror in the viewing region 28. The transition region 32 is preferably more lightly silvered. Within the transition region 32, the extent of reflective material on the front surface 20 varies from a relatively greater amount closer to the viewing region 28 to a relatively lesser amount closer to the observation region 30. This variation within the transition region 32 is for providing a gradual decrease in reflective material, from the viewing region 28 to the observation region 30, to enhance the simulation effect provided by the flame simulating assembly 10. The preferred method of producing the viewing region 28, the observation region 30, and the transition region 32 will be described.

Alternatively, however, the screen 18 could be suitably tinted or otherwise treated in any suitable manner to provide the described simulation effect. For example, the screen could be tinted (i.e., without silvering on the front surface 20) to provide the viewing region 28 and the transition region 32, so that the viewing region 28 is darker than the transition region 32. The observation region 30 could also be tinted or screened

6

to achieve any desired effects, but still permitting relatively unobstructed observation therethrough.

An upper edge 29 of the viewing region 28 (which is also a lower edge 29 of the transition region 32), is shown in FIG. 2B. Also, an upper edge 31 of the transition region 32 (which is also a lower edge 31 of the observation region 30) is shown in FIG. 2B. It will be understood that, in the preferred embodiment, the regions 28, 32, and 30 are not sharply distinguished from each other. The edges 29, 31 are shown as clearly distinguished lines for illustrative purposes. In the preferred embodiment, the change from the viewing region 28 to the transition region 32 is gradual, and the change from the transition region 32 to the observation region 30 is also gradual.

It is also preferred that the simulated interior fireplace wall 26 has a pattern 36 simulating firebrick thereon (FIGS. 1, 2A, 3A). The firebrick pattern 36 preferably resembles firebrick in walls of a firebox in a real fireplace, and tends to enhance the overall simulation effect.

Preferably, the flame simulating assembly 10 also includes a flame effect element 46, for configuring light from the light source 16 to form the image of flames 11. The flame effect element 46 is positioned in the path of light 19 from the light source 16 between the light source 16 and the screen 18. The flame effect element 46 can include one or more apertures (not shown) passing through the apertures forming into the image of flames 11 (FIG. 3A). A similar flame effect element is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,642,580 and in U.S. Pat. No. 6,363,636. U.S. Pat. No. 6,363,636 is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

In the preferred embodiment, the flame simulating assembly 10 also includes a flicker element 44 for causing light from the light source 16 to fluctuate, thereby enhancing the overall simulation effect. The flicker element 44 is positioned in the path of light 19 from the light source 16 between the light source 16 and the screen 18. Preferably, the flicker element 44 is similar to the flicker elements described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,642,580 and 6,363,636.

In the preferred embodiment, the flame simulating assembly 10 includes a housing 48 with a substantially vertical back wall 50, a top wall 52, a bottom wall 54, and at least two side walls 56, 58 extending between the top and bottom walls 52, 54, defining a cavity 60 therein. The cavity 60 has an opening 62 at a front end 12 of the housing 48, so that the cavity 60 is substantially viewable from the front by the observer. The simulated interior wall 26 is preferably proximal to the back wall 50. Preferably, the simulated fuel bed 14 is disposed in the cavity 60 proximal to the opening 62. As shown in FIG. 3A, the screen 18 is positioned behind the simulated fuel bed 14 and in front of the interior wall 26.

As can be seen in FIGS. 1, 2A and 3A, the flame simulating assembly 10 preferably also includes two simulated interior fireplace sidewalls 38, 40. Each of the simulated interior fireplace sidewalls 38, 40 extends from the simulated interior wall 26 forwardly beyond the front surface 20 of the screen 18.

In the preferred embodiment, the interior element 26 has a pattern 36 simulating firebrick in the firebox of a real fireplace thereon. Preferably, the simulated interior fireplace sidewalls 38, 40 also have patterns 42 simulating firebrick thereon. In the preferred embodiment, the patterns 42 on the simulated interior fireplace sidewalls 38, 40 are positioned to be aligned with the pattern 36 on the interior element 26.

Although the pattern 36 and the patterns 42 are simulated firebrick (FIGS. 1 and 2A), various patterns could be used on the interior element 26 and the interior sidewalls 38, 40. As

will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, various patterns could be used to achieve different simulating effects.

In use, the flicker element **44** causes light from the light source **16** to fluctuate upon reflection thereof by the flicker element **44**. In the preferred embodiment, light from the light source **16** reflected by the flicker element **44** and thereby caused to fluctuate, or flicker, is configured by the flame effect element **46** to form one or more images of flames **11** transmitted through the screen **18**. The images of flames **11** appear to be rising from the simulated fuel bed **14**, and the observer also can simultaneously observe the simulated interior fireplace wall **26**. The transition region **32** provides a relatively gradual transition between the viewing region **28** and the observation region **30**, to enhance the simulation effect.

Referring to FIG. **10**, an eye **66** of an observer (not shown) is typically positioned so that a lower extent of the observer's field of vision (schematically represented by a line **67**) intersects the screen **18** at **68**. In FIG. **10**, the lower edge **29** of the transition region **32** (i.e., the upper edge **29** of the viewing region **28**) (FIG. **2B**) is preferably located substantially at **68** on the front surface **20** of the screen **18**. Similarly, an approximate middle of the observer's field of vision (schematically represented by a line **69**) intersects the screen **18** at **70**. In the preferred embodiment, the lower edge **31** of the observation region **30** (i.e., the upper edge **31** of the transition region **32**) (FIG. **2B**) is preferably located at **70** on the front surface **20** of the screen **18**. The positioning of the edges **29**, **31** of the regions **28**, **30**, **32** on the front surface **20** can be varied to suit the relative positioning of the screen **18** and the internal components in a flame simulating assembly **10**, and in accordance with an assumed relative positioning (or range of positions) of the observer.

If preferred, the flame simulating assembly **10** optionally includes a shield **64**, for obstructing light from the light source **16** which is directed to the vicinity of the observation region **30** or for concealing certain components. The shield **64** is preferably positioned behind the screen **18** and below the transition region **32** and beside or below the transition region **32**. As can be seen in FIG. **10**, an observer's eye **66** observing the flame simulating assembly **10** is typically positioned so that the observer cannot observe the flame effect element **46** or other components positioned behind the screen **18** directly. However, it is possible that an observer (not shown) could be positioned so as to view some of the internal components (such as the flicker element **44**, or the flame effect element **46**) directly, or light from the light source **16** directed to the observation region **30** may distract the observer. In either or both of these circumstances, it may be advantageous to include the shield **64** in the flame simulating assembly **10**. A preferred embodiment of the shield **64** is shown in FIG. **3A**.

However, it has been found that, if the components are positioned appropriately relative to each other and relative to the observation region **30** and the transition region **32**, the shield **64** is generally not necessary. As can be seen in FIG. **10**, the positioning of the flame effect element **46** and the flicker element **44** relative to the transition region **32** and the observation region **30** can affect the effectiveness of the simulation provided by the flame simulating assembly **10**. The flame effect element **46** and the flicker element **44** are preferably not positioned where the ordinarily located observer would be able to observe these components directly through the transition region **32** or the observation region **30**.

Additional embodiments of the invention are shown in FIGS. **3B**, **4**, **5**, **6A**, **6B**, **7-9** and **11-25**. In FIGS. **3B**, **4**, **5**, **6A**, **6B**, **7-9** and **11-25**, elements are numbered so as to correspond to like elements shown in FIGS. **1**, **2A**, **2B**, and **3A**.

An alternative embodiment **110** of the flame simulating assembly is shown in FIGS. **4**, **5** and **6A**. The flame simulating assembly **110** does not include a simulated fuel bed, but is adapted for use with a simulated fuel bed (not shown) which is to be provided separately by a user (not shown). The simulated fuel bed, when provided, is to be located proximate to a front side **112** of the flame simulating assembly **110**. The flame simulating assembly **110** includes a cavity **160**, and also has a light source **116** for providing an image of flames **11** and the screen **18** positioned in the cavity **160**. The flame simulating assembly **110** also includes the simulated interior fireplace wall **26** positioned behind the screen **18**. The screen **18** includes the front surface **20** with the viewing region **28**, the observation region **30**, and the transition region **32** positioned between the viewing region **28** and the observation region **30**. The viewing region **28** is positioned, at least in part, at the bottom of the screen **18**—i.e., adjacent to the simulated fuel bed, once provided. The observation region **30** is positioned distal to the viewing region **28**.

Because it does not include a simulated fuel bed, the flame simulating assembly **110** requires relatively less materials, and would be relatively less costly to construct. The user could use any materials chosen by the user as a simulated fuel bed. For example, real wooden logs (with or without a grate) could be used.

Although the flame simulating assembly **110** is adapted for use with a separate simulated fuel bed, the flame simulating assembly **110** also could be used without a simulated fuel bed, if the user so chose.

In the flame simulating assembly **110**, the simulated interior fireplace wall **26** is preferably mounted on or positioned adjacent to the back wall **50**. Also, the flame simulating assembly **110** preferably includes two simulated interior fireplace sidewalls **38**, **40**. Each of the simulated interior fireplace sidewalls **38**, **40** extends from the simulated interior fireplace wall **26** forwardly beyond the front surface **20** of the screen **18**. The simulated interior fireplace wall **26** preferably includes the pattern **36** simulating firebrick thereon. Preferably, the simulated interior fireplace sidewalls **38**, **40** also have patterns **42** simulating firebrick thereon. It is preferred that the patterns **42** on the simulated interior fireplace sidewalls **38**, **40** are positioned to be aligned with the pattern **36** on the back wall **26**.

In another alternative embodiment **210** of the flame simulating assembly of the invention, as can be seen in FIG. **3B**, a flicker element **244** is positioned substantially underneath the simulated fuel bed **14**. The flame simulating assembly **210** includes the housing **48**, and a flame effect element **246** is mounted on or positioned proximal to the back wall **50**. The flame effect element **246** is substantially reflective, and is preferably formed in the shape of flames. Preferably, the flame effect element **246** is similar to a flame effect element disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,564,485. U.S. Pat. No. 6,564,485 is hereby incorporated herein by reference. Also, however, a simulated interior fireplace wall **226** is mounted proximal to the back wall **50**, and in the vicinity of the flame effect element **246**.

The flicker element **244** is positioned in a path of light **219** between the light source **16** and the screen **18**. Similarly, the flame effect element **246** is positioned in the path of light **219** between the light source **16** and the screen **18**. The path of light **219** is schematically represented by arrows **213**, **215**, and **217** (FIG. **3B**).

The screen **18** in the flame simulating assembly **210** includes the viewing region **28**, the observation region **30**, and the transition region **32**. The flicker element **244** causes light from the light source **16** to fluctuate upon reflection thereof by

the flicker element **44**. Light from the light source **16** which is reflected by the flicker element **44** and thereby caused to fluctuate, or flicker, is configured by the flame effect element **246** to form one or more images of flames **11** transmitted through the screen **18**. The images of flames **11** appear to be rising from the simulated fuel bed **14**, and the observer also can simultaneously observe the simulated interior fireplace wall **226**. The transition region **32** provides a relatively gradual transition between the viewing region **28** and the observation region **30**, to enhance the simulation effect. The positioning of the flicker element **244** substantially underneath the simulated fuel bed **14**, and the positioning of the at least partially reflective flame effect element **246** proximal to, or on the back wall **50**, results in an enhanced simulation effect.

Referring to FIG. **11**, an eye **266** of an observer (not shown) is typically positioned so that a lower extent of the observer's field of vision (schematically represented by a line **267**) intersects the screen **18** at **268**. In FIG. **11**, the lower edge **29** of the transition region **32** (i.e., the upper edge **29** of the viewing region **28**) (FIG. **2B**) is preferably located substantially at **68** on the front surface **20** of the screen **18**. Similarly, an approximate middle of the observer's field of vision (schematically represented by a line **269**) intersects the screen **18** at **270**. In the preferred embodiment, the lower edge **31** of the observation region **30** (i.e., the upper edge **31** of the transition region **32**) (FIG. **2B**) is preferably located on the front surface **20** of the screen **18**. The positioning of the edges **29**, **31** of the regions **28**, **30**, **32** on the front surface **20** can be varied to suit the relative positioning of the screen **18** and the internal components in a flame simulating assembly **210**, and in accordance with an assumed relative positioning (or range of positions) of the observer.

If preferred, the flame simulating assembly **210** optionally includes a shield **264**, for obstructing light from the light source **16** which is directed to the vicinity of the observation region **30** or for concealing certain components. The shield **264** is preferably positioned behind the screen **18** and beside or below the transition region **32**. As can be seen in FIG. **11**, an observer's eye **266** observing the flame simulating assembly **210** is typically positioned so that the observer cannot observe the flame effect element **246** or other components positioned behind the screen **18** directly. However, it is possible that an observer (not shown) could be positioned so as to view some of the internal components (such as the flicker element **244**, or the flame effect element **246**) directly, or light from the light source **16** directed to the observation region **30** may distract the observer. In either or both of these circumstances, it may be advantageous to include the shield **264** in the flame simulating assembly **210**. A preferred embodiment of the shield **264** is shown in FIG. **3B**.

However, it has been found that, if the components are positioned appropriately relative to each other and relative to the observation region **30** and the transition region **32**, the shield **264** is generally not necessary. As can be seen in FIG. **11**, the positioning of the flame effect element **246** and the flicker element **244** relative to the transition region **32** and the observation region **30** can affect the effectiveness of the simulation provided by the flame simulating assembly **210**. The flame effect element **246** and the flicker element **244** are preferably not positioned where the ordinarily located observer would be able to observe these components directly through the transition region **32** or the observation region **30**.

In FIG. **6B**, another alternative embodiment **280** of a flame simulating assembly of the invention is shown. The flame simulating assembly **280** is the same as the flame simulating assembly **210** shown in FIG. **3B**, except that flame simulating

assembly **280** does not include a simulated fuel bed. As in flame simulating assembly **110**, the user can provide a simulated fuel bed or, if preferred, operate the unit without a simulated fuel bed. The flame simulating assembly **280** also is not shown as including the optional shield element.

An alternative embodiment **318** of a screen is shown in FIGS. **12-14**. As can be seen in FIG. **12**, the screen **318** is included in an alternative embodiment of a flame simulating assembly **310**. The flame simulating assembly **330** includes the housing **48**, which includes the back wall **50**, a top wall **352**, a bottom wall **54**, and at least two side walls **56**, **58** extending between the top and bottom walls **352**, **54**. The flame simulating assembly **310** also includes a simulated interior fireplace wall **326** mounted on or positioned proximal to the back wall **50**. The screen **318** is positioned behind the simulated fuel bed **14** and in front of the simulated interior fireplace wall **326**.

As can be seen in FIG. **12**, the flame simulating assembly **310** also includes a light source **316**, a flicker element **344** positioned in a path of light **319** (schematically represented by arrows **315**, **317**), and a flame effect element **346**, also positioned in the path of light **319**. The flame effect element **346** is for configuring light from the light source **316** into one or more images of flames **11** which are transmitted through the screen **318**. The flicker element **344** is for causing light from the light source to flicker or fluctuate, thereby enhancing the overall simulation effect.

As can be seen in FIGS. **12** and **14**, the screen **318** extends upwardly to a top edge **370**, located distal to the simulated fuel bed **14**. The top edge **370** is spaced apart from the top wall **352** to form an upper opening **372** between the top wall **352** and the screen **318**. Substantially unobstructed observation is thus permitted through the upper opening **372**, so that the simulated interior fireplace wall **326** is observable. Because this is similar to the substantially unobstructed observation of a firebox which may be enjoyed by an observer of a real fireplace (i.e., one in which wood or coal may be burned), the upper opening **372** tends to enhance the overall simulation effect.

Optionally, a shield **374** (shown in FIG. **12**) may be included in the flame simulating assembly **310**. The shield **374** (similar to the shield **64**, shown in FIG. **3A**) is for obstructing light from the light source **16** which may be directed above the top edge **370** of the screen **318** or for concealing certain components. The shield **374** is preferably positioned behind the screen **318** and beside or below the transition region **332**. It is possible that the observer could be positioned so as to view some of the internal components (such as the flicker element **344**, or the flame effect element **346**) directly, or light from the light source **16** directed above the top edge **370** of the screen **318** may distract the observer. In either or both of these circumstances, it may be advantageous to include the shield **374** in the flame simulating assembly **310**. A preferred embodiment of the shield **374** is shown in FIG. **12**.

However, it has been found that, if the internal components are positioned appropriately relative to each other and relative to the transition region **332** and the top edge **370**, the shield **374** is generally not necessary. The flame effect element **346** and the flicker element **344** are preferably not positioned where the ordinarily located observer would be able to observe these components directly through the transition region **332** or the upper opening **372**.

Preferably, the screen **318** includes a viewing region **328** and a transition region **332**. In the preferred embodiment, the viewing region **328** is partially reflective, although the images of flames **11** are also transmittable through the viewing region

11

328. Also, the screen 318 preferably includes a transition region 332 extending from the viewing region 328 to the top edge 370. The transition region 332 is preferably lightly silvered (and therefore also partially reflective), so that the simulated interior fireplace wall 326 is at least partially view-
 5 able through the transition region 332. A back surface 334 of the screen 318 diffuses light from the light source 16, also to enhance the overall simulation effect. Also, however, the images of flames 11 are partially observable through the transition region 332.

Alternatively, the viewing region 332 is translucent. For example, the screen 318 could be suitably tinted glass or plastic (or other suitable material) through which the image of flames 11 is transmittable. The transition region 332 also
 15 could be suitably tinted, to enhance the overall simulation effect.

Another alternative embodiment of a flame simulating assembly 410 of the invention, shown in FIG. 13, includes the screen 318. In the flame simulating assembly 410, a flicker element 444 is positioned substantially underneath the simulated fuel bed 14. The flame simulating assembly 410 includes the housing 48, and a flame effect element 446 is mounted on or positioned proximal to the back wall 50. The flame effect element 446 is preferably reflective (or substantially reflective), and is preferably formed in the shape of flames. Preferably, the flame effect element 446 is similar to a flame effect element disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,564,485. Also, however, a simulated interior fireplace wall 426 is mounted proximal to the back wall 50, and in the vicinity of the flame effect element 446.

The flicker element 444 is positioned in a path of light 419 between the light source 16 and the screen 318. Also, the flame effect element 446 is positioned in the path of light 419 between the light source 16 and the screen 318. The path of light 419 is schematically represented by arrows 413, 415, 35 and 417 (FIG. 13).

The positioning of the flicker element 444 substantially underneath the simulated fuel bed 14, and the positioning of the flame effect element 446 proximal to or on the back wall 50, results in an enhanced simulation effect. Preferably, the flame simulating assembly 410 includes a shield 464 for obstructing light from the light source directed above the screen 318.

The translucent portion 28 and the transition portion 32 on the front surface 12 of the screen 18 are preferably partially reflective, and are preferably created as follows. As shown in FIG. 7, a source 181 of vaporized metal (not shown) adapted for spraying vaporized metal onto the front surface 20 is provided. Also, a mask element 182 is provided, to substantially prevent vaporized metal sprayed from the source 181 from condensing on the transparent portion 32 of the front surface 20. The mask element 182 is positioned in a predetermined mask position relative to the source 181 and the front surface 20, as shown in FIGS. 7-9. The source 181 is also positioned in a predetermined source position relative to the mask element 182 and the front surface 20 so that vaporized metal is sprayable from the source 181 onto the translucent portion 28 and the transition portion 32 of the front surface 20.

The path of the vaporized metal sprayed from the source 181 onto the front surface 20 is schematically shown by arrows C and D in FIG. 9. The arrows identified as C in FIG. 9 represent metal vapor which is sprayed directly onto the front surface 20 to form the translucent portion 28. The arrows identified as D in FIG. 9 represent the metal vapor which is distributed over a portion of the front surface 20 to form the transition portion 32. As can be seen in FIG. 9, the transition portion 32 is in an area 184 on which vaporized

12

metal condenses, spread out so that its concentration is not as great as in the translucent portion because the mask element 182 prevents spraying of the vaporized metal directly onto the area 184. As can be seen in FIG. 9, the mask element 182 also prevents vaporized metal from condensing in the transparent portion 30, formed in an area 186.

Preferably, the screen 18, 118 comprises glass. Alternatively, a suitable polycarbonate (such as plexiglas) or a suitable acrylic material can be used.

The vaporized metal is preferably produced by passing a relatively high electric current through a suitably prepared metal, such as aluminium. As is known in the art, the high current vaporizes the metal, i.e., changes the metal so that it is in a gaseous state. The vaporized metal can then be sprayed onto a surface which is at a lower temperature (e.g., the surface 20, at room temperature), causing the rapid "condensation" (i.e., solidification) of the vaporized metal on the cooler surface.

Alternatively, some or all of the viewing region 28 can be formed using silvered film, attached to the front surface by any suitable means. For example, where the viewing region includes silvered film, the transition region could be formed by spraying suitable materials onto the front surface. Alternatively, both the viewing region 28 and the transition region 32 could be formed using silvered film.

Another embodiment of the flame simulating assembly 510 of the invention is shown in FIGS. 15-20. As can be seen in FIGS. 19 and 20, the flame simulating assembly 510 includes a substantially transparent front panel 588 having a rear side 589 and a front side 590 opposed thereto. Preferably, the flame simulating assembly 510 also includes a partially transparent screen 518 with a partially reflective front surface 520 and a rear surface 534 opposed thereto (FIG. 19). The front surface 520 is positioned to face the rear side 589 of the front panel 588, and is spaced apart therefrom by approximately a predetermined distance "L", as will be described. As can be seen in FIGS. 15 and 19, the front surface 520 of the screen is positioned substantially parallel to the rear side 589 of the front panel 588. The flame simulating assembly 510 also includes a number of first dots 592 (FIG. 16) which are disposed on the front panel 588 in a sufficiently consistent density over a given area to provide a substantially uniform tinted appearance to the front panel 588 when observed through the front side 590 in the manner disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,050,011, the entire specification of which is incorporated herein by reference. Preferably, the front panel 588 also includes a number of second dots 594 (FIG. 16) which are substantially aligned with the first dots 592 and which face the front surface 520 of the screen 518, in the manner disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,050,011. As can be seen in FIG. 16, the second dots 594 are smaller than the first dots 592. Preferably, the second dots 594 are arranged in a pattern 593 to define a first image 595 (as shown in FIG. 15) positioned for reflection by at least a part of the front surface 520 of the screen 518, to provide a virtual image 596 (as shown in FIG. 17) of the first image 595. The pattern 593 preferably is such that the first image 595 resembles firebrick, as will be described. The first image is substantially invisible to an observer looking through the front side of the front wall other than as a reflected image (i.e., the virtual image 596), reflected by a part of the front surface 520.

The flame simulating assembly 510 also includes a back wall 550 positioned behind the screen 518. Preferably, the back wall 550 displays a second image 551 on an exposed surface 553 thereof facing the rear surface 534 of the screen 518. The exposed surface 553 is spaced apart from the front surface 520 of the screen 518 by approximately the predeter-

mined distance “L”. Preferably, the exposed surface **553** substantially defines a plane “P”, and it is also preferred that the exposed surface **553** is positioned substantially parallel to the front surface **520** of the screen **518** (FIG. **19**). In addition, the second image **551** is at least partially observable through the front side **590** of the front panel **588**. As a result of the structure of the flame simulating assembly **510** (as described above), the virtual image **596** is located substantially in the plane “P” of the exposed surface **553** (i.e., the same plane in which the second image **551** is located) so that the virtual image **596** appears to the observer to be positioned behind the screen **518**, as will be described. Preferably, the surfaces involved—i.e., the exposed surface of the back wall **550**; the front surface **520**; and the rear side **589** of the front panel **588**—are all substantially parallel to each other.

The positioning of the back wall, the screen, and the front wall is also schematically illustrated in FIG. **25**. The distance between the back wall and the front surface of the screen is substantially the same as the distance between the front surface of the screen and the rear side of the front panel. If the elements referred to are located accordingly, the virtual image is located in the same plane “P” as the second image, which second image is displayed on the back wall. If different distances separate the back wall from the front surface of the screen (on one hand) and the front surface of the screen from the rear side of the front panel (on the other hand), then the virtual image would not be presented in the same plane as the second image. It may be desirable in certain circumstances to achieve such a result.

As shown in FIG. **18**, the front surface **520** of the screen **518** includes an observation region **530**, which is adapted to permit observation of at least a portion of the exposed surface **553** of the back wall **550**. The front surface **520** also includes a viewing region **528** (FIGS. **15**, **17**).

As can be seen in FIGS. **15**, **17**, **19** and **20**, the flame simulating assembly **510** preferably includes a simulated fuel bed **514** which is positioned adjacent to the viewing region **528**. In the preferred embodiment, the images of flames **11** are transmitted through the front surface **520** proximal to the simulated fuel bed **514**, for a realistic flame simulation effect.

Preferably, the viewing region **528** is partially reflective. Because of this, the simulated fuel bed **514** is reflected in the viewing region **528** to an extent sufficient to provide an illusion of depth, as described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,642,580. U.S. Pat. No. 5,642,580 is hereby incorporated herein by reference. However, the images of flames **11** are also transmittable through the partially reflective viewing region **528**. As can be seen in FIG. **17**, the viewing region **528** is located proximal to the simulated fuel bed **514** so that, when images of flames **11** are transmitted through the screen **518**, the images of flames **11** appear to be rising from and out of the simulated fuel bed **514**, similar to flames in a real fire. At the same time, the back wall **550** (i.e., the exposed surface **553** thereof) is observable through an observation region **530**, thereby simulating a fire-box in a real fireplace (not shown) in which, e.g., wood or coal may be burned. The observation region **530** is preferably transparent or translucent, or at least partially transparent or translucent.

It is preferred that the front surface **520** of the screen **518** also includes a transition region **532** disposed between the viewing region **528** and the observation region **530**. Preferably, the images of flames **11** are at least partially transmittable through the transition region **532**, and the back wall **550** is also at least partially observable through the transition region **532**. The transition region **532** is adapted to provide a relatively gradual transition from the viewing region **528** to the observation region **530**, in order to provide a more real-

istic overall simulation effect. Preferably, if the viewing region **528** is partially reflective, then the transition region **532** is also partially reflective, however, to a somewhat lesser extent. To achieve this, the transition region **532** is preferably less silvered relative to the viewing region **528**, as will be described.

In the preferred embodiment, the back surface **534** is adapted to diffuse light transmitted through the screen **518** to prevent an observer (not shown) from directly observing the light source **516**, or other internal components of the flame simulating assembly **510**, through the viewing region **548** and the transition region. Such a diffusing surface is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,642,580. In the preferred embodiment of the flame simulating assembly **510**, however, the back surface **534** of the screen **518** includes a diffusing portion **533** (not shown) which is located substantially opposite to the viewing region **528** and the transition region **532**. The back surface **534** may also include a non-diffusing portion (not shown) which is located substantially opposite to the observation region **30**.

Preferably, the diffusing portion **533** is divided into a first part (not shown) located opposite to the viewing region **528**, and a second part (not shown) located opposite to the transition region **532**. The extent to which light is diffused by the second part is somewhat less than the extent to which light is diffused by the first part. Because of this, the back wall **550** is at least partially observable through the transition region **532**.

Preferably, the screen **518** is glass, plastic, or another other suitable material. In the preferred embodiment, the screen **518** is lightly silvered so that it is partially reflective, to provide a two-way mirror in the viewing region **528**. The transition region **532** is preferably less silvered, and the observation region **530** preferably is not silvered. Within the transition region **532**, the extent of reflective material on the front surface **520** varies from a relatively greater amount closer to the viewing region **528** to a relatively lesser amount closer to the observation region **530**. This variation within the transition region **532** is to provide a gradual decrease in reflective material, from the viewing region **528** to the observation region **530**, to enhance the simulation effect provided by the flame simulating assembly **510**. The preferred method of producing the viewing region **528**, the observation region **530**, and the transition region **532** is described above, in connection with other embodiments of the present invention.

Alternatively, however, the screen **518** could be suitably tinted or otherwise treated in any suitable manner to provide the described simulation effect. For example, the screen could be tinted (i.e., with or without silvering on the front surface **520**) to provide the viewing region **528** and the transition region **532**, so that the viewing region **528** is darker than the transition region **532**. The observation region **530** could also be lightly tinted or screened to achieve any desired effects, but still permitting relatively unobstructed observation there-through.

An upper edge **529** of the viewing region **528** (which is also a lower edge of the transition region **532**), is shown in FIG. **18**. Also, an upper edge **531** of the transition region **532** (which is also a lower edge of the observation region **530**) is shown in FIG. **18**. It will be understood that, in the preferred embodiment, the regions **528**, **532**, and **530** are not sharply distinguished from each other. The edges **529**, **531** are shown as clearly distinguished lines in the attached drawings for illustrative purposes only. In the preferred embodiment, the change from the viewing region **28** to the transition region **32** is gradual, and the change from the transition region **32** to the observation region **30** is also gradual, so that a distinct boundary in each case is not displayed.

15

As can be seen in FIGS. 15 and 17, it is also preferred that the back wall 550 has a pattern 536 simulating firebrick thereon (i.e., the pattern 536 being on the exposed surface 553), providing the second image 551. The firebrick pattern 536 preferably resembles firebrick in walls of a firebox in a real fireplace, and tends to enhance the overall simulation effect, as will be described.

Preferably, the flame simulating assembly 510 also includes a flame effect element 546, for configuring light from the light source 516 to form the image of flames 11. The flame effect element 546 is positioned in the path of light 19 (FIG. 19) from the light source 516 between the light source 516 and the screen 518. The flame effect element 546 can include one or more apertures (not shown) for configuring light passing through the apertures into the image of flames 11. It is preferred that the flame effect element 546 is similar to the flame effect element which is described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,363,636, the entire specification of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

In the preferred embodiment, the flame simulating assembly 510 also includes a flicker element 544 for causing light from the light source 516 to fluctuate, thereby enhancing the overall simulation effect. The flicker element 544 is positioned in the path of light 519 from the light source 516 between the light source 516 and the screen 518. Preferably, the flicker element 544 is similar to the flicker elements described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,642,580 and 6,363,636. The path of light 519 is schematically represented by arrows 513, 515, and 517 (FIG. 19).

It is also preferred that the flame simulating assembly 510 includes a housing 548 with the substantially vertical back wall 550, a top wall 552, a bottom wall 554, and at least two side walls 556, 558 extending between the top and bottom walls 552, 554, to at least partially define a cavity 560 therein. The cavity 560 has an opening 562 at a front end 512 of the housing 548, so that the cavity 560 is substantially viewable from the front by the observer. Preferably, the simulated fuel bed 514 is disposed in the cavity 560 proximal to the opening 562. The front panel 588 is preferably positioned in the opening 562. As shown in FIG. 19, the screen 518 is positioned behind the simulated fuel bed 514 and in front of the back wall 550.

As can be seen in FIGS. 17, 19, and 20, the flame simulating assembly 510 preferably also includes two simulated interior fireplace sidewalls 538, 540. Preferably, each of the simulated interior fireplace sidewalls 538, 540 extends from the back wall 550 forwardly beyond the front surface 520 of the screen 518 (FIGS. 19 and 20).

As indicated above, it is preferred that the pattern 536 on the back wall 550 simulates firebrick, e.g., such as would be seen in the firebox of a real fireplace. It is further preferred that the back wall 550 includes real firebrick, in order to provide a more realistic second image 551. Preferably, the simulated interior fireplace sidewalls 538, 540 also have patterns 542 simulating firebrick thereon. It is also preferred that the patterns 542 on the simulated interior fireplace sidewalls 538, 540 are substantially aligned with the pattern 536 on the back wall 550 (and hence also with the second image 551), to enhance the overall simulation effect provided by the flame simulating assembly 510. Preferably, the virtual image 596 is also aligned (i.e., congruent) with the patterns 536 and 542, as will be described.

Although the pattern 536 and the patterns 542 are simulated firebrick (FIGS. 17, 19, and 20), various patterns could be used on the back wall 550 and the interior sidewalls 538, 540. In order to achieve an effective simulation, the pattern 593 should be substantially the same as the patterns 536 and

16

542, so that the virtual image 596 and the image 551 are substantially congruent and aligned with the pattern 542. As will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, various patterns could be used to achieve different simulation effects.

In use, the flicker element 544 causes light from the light source 516 to fluctuate upon reflection thereof by the flicker element 544, similar to fluctuating light produced by a fire. In the preferred embodiment, light from the light source 516 reflected by the flicker element 544 and thereby caused to fluctuate, or flicker, is configured by the flame effect element 546 to form one or more images of flames 11 transmitted through the screen 518. The images of flames 11 appear to be rising from the simulated fuel bed 514, and the observer also can simultaneously observe the simulated back wall 550 and the side walls 538, 540. The transition region 532 provides a relatively gradual transition between the viewing region 528 and the observation region 530, to enhance the simulation effect.

Referring to FIG. 20, the eye 66 of an observer (not shown) is typically positioned so that a lower extent of the observer's field of vision (schematically represented by a line 567) intersects the screen 518 at 568. In FIG. 20, the lower edge 529 of the transition region 532 (i.e., the upper edge 529 of the viewing region 528) (FIG. 18) is preferably located approximately at 568 on the front surface 520 of the screen 518. Similarly, an approximate middle of the observer's field of vision (schematically represented by a line 569) intersects the screen 518 approximately at 570. In the preferred embodiment, the lower edge 531 of the observation region 530 (i.e., the upper edge 531 of the transition region 532) (FIG. 18) is preferably located approximately at 570 on the front surface 520 of the screen 518. The positioning of the edges 529, 531 of the regions 528, 530, 532 on the front surface 520 can be varied to suit the relative positioning of the screen 518 and the internal components in a flame simulating assembly 510, and in accordance with an assumed relative positioning (or range of positions) of the observer's eye(s).

The virtual image 596 is viewable by the observer due to the reflection of the first image 595 in the viewing region 528 (and to an extent, in the transition region 532). The observer simultaneously views the second image 551 through the observation region 530 and, to an extent, also through the transition region 532. As indicated above, the patterns in the virtual image 596 and the second image 551 are congruent and aligned with each other. The virtual image 596 also appears to be located in the plane "P", i.e., the plane substantially defined by the front surface of the back wall, to enhance the simulation of a firebrick wall positioned behind the image of flames 11.

If preferred, the flame simulating assembly 510 optionally includes a shield 564, for obstructing light from the light source 516 which is directed to the vicinity of the observation region 530 or for concealing certain components. The shield 564 is preferably positioned behind the screen 518 and below the transition region 532 and beside or below the transition region 532. As can be seen in FIG. 20, the observer's eye 66 observing the flame simulating assembly 510 is typically positioned so that the observer cannot observe the flame effect element 546 or other components positioned behind the screen 518 directly. However, it is possible that an observer (not shown) could be positioned so as to view some of the internal components (such as the flicker element 544, or the flame effect element 546) directly, or light from the light source 516 directed to the observation region 530 may distract the observer. In either or both of these circumstances, it may be advantageous to include the shield 564 in the flame simulating assembly 510.

However, it has been found that, if the components are positioned appropriately relative to each other and relative to the observation region 530 and the transition region 532, the shield 564 may not be necessary. As can be seen in FIG. 20, the positioning of the flame effect element 546 and the flicker element 544 relative to the transition region 532 and the observation region 30 can affect the effectiveness of the simulation provided by the flame simulating assembly 510. The flame effect element 546 and the flicker element 544 are preferably not positioned where the ordinarily located observer would be able to observe these components directly through the transition region 532 or the observation region 530.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the virtual image 596 and the second image 551 preferably are positioned and formed to be substantially congruent, or aligned with each other, so that the virtual image 596 and the second image 551 appear to be substantially continuous relative to each other. Also, the pattern 542 on the sidewalls 538, 540 is preferably aligned with the pattern 536.

As disclosed in the attached Figures, the first image 595 and the second image 551 preferably are representations of firebrick arranged in a brick wall. It will be understood that the second image 551 could be created, for example, by providing the back wall 550 which is (in whole or in part) a brick wall with real firebricks, positioned so that they are substantially congruent with the firebrick images in the virtual image 596. Using real firebricks in the back wall 550 is preferred because it provides a more realistic effect.

Preferably, the exposed surface 553 is at least partially observable through the observation region 530 of the screen 518 from the front side 590 of the front panel 588.

Another alternative embodiment of a flame simulating assembly 610 of the invention is shown in FIGS. 21 and 22, a flicker element 644 is positioned substantially underneath the simulated fuel bed 614. The flame simulating assembly 610 includes the housing 648, and a flame effect element 646 is mounted on or positioned proximal to a back wall 650 of the housing 648. The flame effect element 646 is substantially reflective, and is preferably formed in the shape of flames, for configuring light reflected from the flicker element 644 to resemble flames. Preferably, the flame effect element 646 is similar to the flame effect element disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,564,485. 6,564,485 is hereby incorporated herein by reference. Also, however, an exposed surface 653 of the back wall 650 preferably provides a firebrick pattern, viewable through a front side 590 of the front panel 588.

The flicker element 644 is positioned in a path of light 619 between the light source 616 and the screen 618. Similarly, the flame effect element 646 is positioned in the path of light 619 between the light source 616 and the screen 618. The path of light 619 is schematically represented by arrows 613, 615, and 617 (FIG. 21).

Preferably, the screen 618 in the flame simulating assembly 610 has a front surface 620 which includes the viewing region 628, an observation region 630, and a transition region 632. The flicker element 644 causes light from the light source 616 to fluctuate upon reflection thereof by the flicker element 644. Light from the light source 616 which is reflected by the flicker element 644 and thereby caused to fluctuate, or flicker, is configured by the flame effect element 646 to form one or more images of flames transmitted through the screen 618. The images of flames appear to be rising from the simulated fuel bed 614, and the observer also can simultaneously observe the back wall 650. The transition region 632 provides a relatively gradual transition between the viewing region 628 and the observation region 630, to enhance the simulation

effect. The positioning of the flicker element 644 substantially underneath the simulated fuel bed 614, and the positioning of the at least partially reflective flame effect element 646 proximal to, or on the back wall 650, results in an enhanced simulation effect.

As can be seen in FIGS. 21 and 22, the flame simulating assembly 610 includes the front panel 588 positioned in front of the screen 618. The back wall 650 is positioned a predetermined distance from the front surface 620 of the screen 618, and the front surface 620 is spaced apart from the rear side 589 of the front panel 588 by the same predetermined distance. The panel 588 includes a number of first dots (as in FIG. 16) and a number of second dots (as in FIG. 16) positioned on the first dots, as described above. Accordingly, the second dots are arranged in a pattern (not shown) to define a first image (not shown) positioned for reflection by the front surface 620 of the screen 618, to provide a virtual image of the first image.

More specifically, the first image is reflected by the viewing region 628 and, to an extent, by the transition region 632. The observer simultaneously views a second image on an exposed surface 653 on the back wall 650 through the observation region 630 of the screen 618 (and, to an extent, also through the transition region 632). The virtual image and the pattern on the back wall 650 are congruent and aligned with each other. The virtual image also is located in the plane "P" substantially defined by the exposed surface 653 of the back wall 650, thereby enhancing the simulation of a firebrick wall positioned behind the images of flames. As shown in FIGS. 21 and 22, the flame simulating assembly 610 preferably includes side walls with patterns thereon which are also substantially aligned with the virtual image and the pattern provided on the back wall 650, to further enhance the simulation effect.

Referring to FIG. 22, the eye 66 of an observer (not shown) is typically positioned so that a lower extent of the observer's field of vision (schematically represented by a line 667) intersects the screen 618 at 668. In FIG. 22, the lower edge of the transition region 632 (i.e., the upper edge 629 of the viewing region 628) is preferably located substantially at 668 on the front surface 620 of the screen 618. Similarly, an approximate middle of the observer's field of vision (schematically represented by a line 669) intersects the screen 618 at 670. In the preferred embodiment, the lower edge of the observation region 630 (i.e., the upper edge of the transition region 632) is preferably located on the front surface 620 of the screen 618. The positioning of the edges of the regions 628, 630, 632 on the front surface 620 can be varied to suit the relative positioning of the screen 618 and the internal components in a flame simulating assembly 610, and in accordance with an assumed relative positioning (or range of positions) of the observer.

If preferred, the flame simulating assembly 610 optionally includes a shield 664, for obstructing light from the light source 616 which is directed to the vicinity of the observation region 630 or for concealing certain components. The shield 664 is preferably positioned behind the screen 618 and beside or below the transition region 632 (FIGS. 21, 22). As can be seen in FIG. 22, the observer's eye 66 observing the flame simulating assembly 610 is typically positioned so that the observer cannot observe the flame effect element 646 or other components positioned behind the screen 618 directly. However, it is possible that an observer (not shown) could be positioned so as to view some of the internal components (such as the flicker element 644, or the flame effect element 646) directly, or light from the light source 616 directed to the observation region 630 may distract the observer. In either or

both of these circumstances, it may be advantageous to include the shield **664** in the flame simulating assembly **610**.

However, it has been found that, if the components are positioned appropriately relative to each other and relative to the observation region **630** and the transition region **632**, the shield **664** is generally not necessary. As can be seen in FIG. **22**, the positioning of the flame effect element **646** and the flicker element **644** relative to the transition region **632** and the observation region **630** can affect the effectiveness of the simulation provided by the flame simulating assembly **610**. The flame effect element **646** and the flicker element **644** are preferably not positioned where the ordinarily located observer would be able to observe these components directly through the transition region **632** or the observation region **630**.

As shown in FIG. **23**, another embodiment of the flame simulating assembly **710** of the invention additionally includes a housing **748** in which the screen **718** is positioned. In one embodiment, the screen **718** has a top edge **770** spaced apart from a top wall **752** of the housing **748** to define an upper opening **772** so that the exposed surface is at least partially observable through the front side **590** of the front panel **588** and the upper opening **772**. In addition to the top wall **752**, the housing **748** includes a back wall **750** behind the screen **718**. Preferably, the housing **748** also includes side walls extending forward from the back wall **750** beyond the screen **718**, with a firebrick pattern thereon to enhance the simulation effect. A simulated fuel bed **714** is positioned in front of the screen **718**.

As can be seen in FIG. **23**, the flame simulating assembly **710** also includes a light source **716**, a flicker element **744** positioned in a path of light **719** (schematically represented by arrows **715**, **717**), and a flame effect element **746**, also positioned in the path of light **719**. The flame effect element **746** is for configuring light from the light source **716** into one or more images of flames **11** which are transmitted through the screen **718**. The flicker element **744** is for causing light from the light source to flicker or fluctuate, thereby enhancing the overall simulation effect.

As can also be seen in FIG. **23**, substantially unobstructed observation is permitted through the upper opening **772**, so that part of the back wall **750** is observable. Also, parts of the side walls are observable through the opening **772**. Because this is similar to the substantially unobstructed observation of a firebox which may be enjoyed by an observer of a real fireplace (i.e., one in which wood or coal may be burned), the upper opening **772** tends to enhance the overall simulation effect.

FIG. **23** also shows that the front panel **588** is positioned in front of the screen **718**. The back wall **750** is positioned a predetermined distance from the front surface **720** of the screen **718**, and the front surface **720** is spaced apart from the rear side **589** of the front panel **588** by the same predetermined distance. The panel **588** includes a number of first dots (as in FIG. **16**) and a number of second dots (as in FIG. **16**) positioned on the first dots, as described above. Accordingly, the second dots are arranged in a pattern (not shown) to define a first image (not shown) positioned for reflection by the front surface **720** of the screen **718**, to provide a virtual image of the first image.

More specifically, the first image is reflected by the viewing region **728** and, to an extent, by the transition region **732**. The observer simultaneously views a second image on an exposed surface **753** on the back wall **750** through the opening **772** (and, to an extent, also through the transition region **732**). The virtual image and the pattern on the back wall **750** are congruent and aligned with each other. The virtual image also is

located in the plane "P" substantially defined by the exposed surface **753** of the back wall **750**, thereby enhancing the simulation of a firebrick wall positioned behind the images of flames. As shown in FIG. **23**, the flame simulating assembly **710** preferably includes side walls with patterns thereon which are also substantially aligned with the virtual image and the pattern provided on the back wall **750**, to further enhance the simulation effect.

Optionally, a shield **774** (shown in FIG. **23**) may be included in the flame simulating assembly **710**. The shield **774** is for obstructing light from the light source **716** which may be directed above the top edge **770** of the screen **718** or for concealing certain components. The shield **774** is preferably positioned behind the screen **718** and beside or below the transition region **732**. It is possible that the observer could be positioned so as to view some of the internal components (such as the flicker element **744**, or the flame effect element **746**) directly, or light from the light source **716** directed above the top edge **770** of the screen **718** may distract the observer. In either or both of these circumstances, it may be advantageous to include the shield **774** in the flame simulating assembly **710**.

Preferably, the screen **718** includes a viewing region **728** and a transition region **732** disposed at least partially between the viewing region **728** and the top edge **770**. In the preferred embodiment, the viewing region **728** is partially reflective, although the images of flames **11** are also transmittable through the viewing region **728**. The transition region **732** preferably extends from the viewing region **728** to the top edge **770**. The transition region **732** is preferably lightly silvered (and therefore also partially reflective), so that the back wall **750** is at least partially viewable through the transition region **732**. A back surface **734** of the screen **718** diffuses light from the light source **716**, also to enhance the overall simulation effect. Also, however, the images of flames **11** are partially observable through the transition region **732**.

Alternatively, the viewing region **732** is translucent. For example, the screen **718** could be suitably tinted glass or plastic (or other suitable material) through which the image of flames **11** is transmittable. The transition region **732** also could be suitably tinted, to enhance the overall simulation effect.

Alternatively, the front surface **720** may also include one or more observation regions **730**, generally disposed between the transition region **732** and the top edge **770**. Also, it will be understood that the top edge **770** may be curved, or substantially horizontal. If curved, for example, the top edge may define a screen (not shown) which is generally semi-circular, to provide a front surface which is sufficiently large to accommodate the image of flames **11** which is commensurate with the simulated fuel bed **714**.

It has been found that, if the internal components are positioned appropriately relative to each other and relative to the transition region **732** and the top edge **770**, the shield **774** is generally not necessary. The flame effect element **746** and the flicker element **744** are preferably not positioned where the ordinarily located observer would be able to observe these components directly through the transition region **732** or the upper opening **772**.

Another alternative embodiment of a flame simulating assembly **810** of the invention, shown in FIG. **24**, includes a screen **818** which is similar to the screen **718**. In the flame simulating assembly **810**, a flicker element **844** is positioned substantially underneath the simulated fuel bed **814**. The flame simulating assembly **810** includes a housing **848**, and a flame effect element **846** is mounted on or positioned proximal to a back wall **850** included in the housing **848**. The flame

21

effect element **846** is preferably reflective (or substantially reflective), and is preferably formed in the shape of flames. Preferably, the flame effect element **846** is similar to a flame effect element disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,564,485. Also, however, an exposed surface **853** of the back wall **850** preferably provides a firebrick pattern.

The screen **818** has a top edge **870** spaced apart from a top wall **852** of the housing **848** to define an upper opening **872** through which the exposed surface **853** is viewable by the observer through the front side **590** of the front panel **588** and the opening **872**. Preferably, the flame simulating assembly **810** also includes side walls extending forward from the back wall **850** beyond the screen **818** with a firebrick pattern thereon, to enhance the simulation effect.

The flicker element **844** is positioned in a path of light **819** between the light source **816** and the screen **818**. Also, the flame effect element **846** is positioned in the path of light **819** between the light source **816** and the screen **818**. The path of light **819** is schematically represented by arrows **813**, **815**, and **817** (FIG. 24).

As can be seen in FIG. 24, the flame simulating assembly **810** includes the front panel **588** positioned in front of the screen **818**. The back wall **850** is positioned a predetermined distance from the front surface **820** of the screen **818**, and the front surface **820** is spaced apart from the rear side **589** of the front panel **588** by the same predetermined distance. The panel **588** includes a number of first dots (as in FIG. 16) and a number of second dots (as in FIG. 16) positioned on the first dots, as described above. Accordingly, the second dots are arranged in a pattern (not shown) to define a first image (not shown) positioned for reflection by the front surface **820** of the screen **818**, to provide a virtual image of the first image.

More specifically, the first image is reflected by the viewing region **828** and, to an extent, by the transition region **832**. The observer simultaneously views a second image on an exposed surface **853** on the back wall **850** through the opening **872** (and, to an extent, also through the transition region **832**). The virtual image and the pattern on the back wall **850** are congruent and aligned with each other. The virtual image also is located in the plane "P" substantially defined by the exposed surface **853** of the back wall **850**, thereby enhancing the simulation of a firebrick wall positioned behind the images of flames. As shown in FIG. 24, the flame simulating assembly **810** preferably includes side walls with patterns thereon which are also substantially aligned with the virtual image and the pattern provided on the back wall **850**, to further enhance the simulation effect.

As described above in connection with the screen **718**, the screen **818** may alternatively include an observation region **830**. Also, the top edge **870** may be curved, or substantially horizontal.

The positioning of the flicker element **844** substantially underneath the simulated fuel bed **814**, and the positioning of the flame effect element **846** proximal to or on the back wall **850**, results in an enhanced simulation effect. Preferably, the flame simulating assembly **810** includes a shield **864** for obstructing light from the light source directed above the screen **818**.

It will be evident to those skilled in the art that the invention can take many forms, and that such forms are within the scope of the invention as claimed. Therefore, the spirit and scope of the appended claims should not be limited to the descriptions of the versions contained herein.

We claim:

1. An assembly comprising:

a substantially transparent front panel having a rear side and a front side opposed thereto;

22

a partially translucent screen with a partially reflective front surface and a rear surface opposed thereto, the front surface being positioned to face the rear side of the front panel and being spaced apart therefrom by a predetermined distance;

the front surface of the screen being positioned substantially parallel to the rear side of the front panel;

a plurality of first dots disposed on the front panel in a sufficiently consistent density over a given area to produce a substantially uniform tinted appearance to the front panel when observed through the front side;

a plurality of second dots disposed on the first dots and facing said front surface of the screen, said second dots being smaller than said first dots;

said second dots defining a first image for reflection by at least part of said front surface of the screen to provide a virtual image of the first image;

a back wall positioned behind the screen, the back wall displaying a second image on an exposed surface thereof facing the rear surface of the screen, the exposed surface being spaced apart from the front surface of the screen by the predetermined distance, the exposed surface substantially defining a plane;

the exposed surface of the back wall being positioned substantially parallel to the front surface of the screen;

the second image being at least partially observable through the front side of the front panel; and

the virtual image being located substantially in the plane of the exposed surface such that the virtual image appears to be positioned behind the screen.

2. An assembly according to claim 1 in which the virtual image and the second image are substantially aligned with each other such that the virtual image and the second image appear to be substantially continuous relative to each other.

3. An assembly according to claim 2 in which the first image and the second image comprise representations of firebrick arranged in a brick wall.

4. An assembly according to claim 1 in which the screen comprises an observation region through which the exposed surface is at least partially observable from the front side of the front panel.

5. An assembly according to claim 1 additionally comprising a housing in which the screen is disposed, and the screen comprises a top edge spaced apart from a top wall of the housing to define an upper opening such that the exposed surface is at least partially observable through the front side of the front panel and the upper opening.

6. An assembly according to claim 1 in which the exposed surface is at least partially observable over a top edge of the screen and through the front side of the front panel.

7. An assembly according to claim 1 additionally comprising:

a flame image subassembly for providing at least one image of flames;

a simulated fuel bed positioned in front of the front surface of the screen;

the front surface comprising:

a viewing region disposed proximate to the simulated fuel bed through which said at least one image of flames is transmittable; and

an observation region disposed distal to the simulated fuel bed, the observation region being adapted to permit at least partial observation of the back wall from the front side of the front panel.

8. An assembly according to claim 7 in which the front surface of the screen comprises a transition region disposed

23

between the observation region and the viewing region, the exposed surface being at least partially observable through the transition region.

9. A flame simulating assembly for providing at least one image of flames, the flame simulating assembly comprising:

- a housing comprising a back wall with a substantially planar exposed surface, the housing defining a cavity open at a front end of the housing;
- a screen disposed in the cavity and in front of the back wall, the screen comprising a front surface adapted for transmitting said at least one image of flames therethrough, the front surface being at least partially reflective and being positioned substantially parallel to the exposed surface of the back wall;
- a flame image subassembly for providing said at least one image of flames;
- a substantially transparent front panel disposed substantially at the front end of the housing and comprising a front side and an opposed rear side;
- the rear side of the front panel facing the front surface of the screen and being spaced a predetermined distance apart from the front surface of the screen;
- the rear side of the front panel being positioned substantially parallel to the front surface of the screen;
- the front panel comprising:
 - a plurality of first dots disposed on said front panel in a sufficiently constant density over a given area to produce a substantially uniform tinted appearance to said front panel when observed through said front side;
 - a plurality of second dots disposed on said first dots and facing said front surface of the screen;
 - a first image defined by said second dots, said first image being substantially invisible when observed through the front side other than as a virtual image thereof reflected by the front surface of the screen;
 - the exposed surface of the back wall displaying a second image at least partially observable through the front side of the front panel, the exposed surface being spaced apart from the front surface of the screen by the predetermined distance; and
 - the virtual image being located substantially in the plane of the exposed surface such that the virtual image appears to be positioned behind the screen.

10. A flame simulating assembly according to claim 9 in which the screen comprises at least one observation region permitting at least partial observation of the exposed surface through said front side of the front panel.

11. A flame simulating assembly according to claim 10 in which the screen comprises a viewing region through which said at least one image of flames is transmittable.

12. A flame simulating assembly according to claim 11 in which the screen comprises a transition region disposed between the observation region and the viewing region, the exposed surface being at least partially observable through the transition region.

13. A flame simulating assembly according to claim 9 in which the first image and the second image are representations of a firebrick wall.

14. A flame simulating assembly according to claim 9 in which the second image is provided by firebrick comprising the back wall.

24

15. A flame simulating assembly according to claim 14 in which the firebrick comprises a plurality of surfaces with at least one preselected texture.

16. A flame simulating assembly according to claim 9 in which the screen comprises a top edge which is spaced apart from a roof portion of the housing by a preselected distance to define an upper opening permitting observation of at least part of the exposed surface through said front side of the front panel.

17. An assembly for providing an optical illusion comprising:

- a substantially transparent front panel having a rear side and a front side;

- an at least partially translucent screen positioned substantially vertically, the screen comprising a front surface and a rear surface opposed thereto, the front surface facing the rear side of the front panel;

- the rear side of the front panel being spaced apart from the front surface of the screen by a predetermined distance;

- a back wall positioned behind the screen comprising a plurality of objects collectively providing a substantially planar exposed surface thereof facing the rear surface of the screen, the exposed surface being spaced apart from the front surface of the screen by the predetermined distance;

- the front panel comprising:

- a plurality of first dots disposed on said front panel in a sufficiently constant density over a given area to produce a substantially uniform tinted appearance to said front wall when observed through said front side, each said first dot having a preselected area;

- a plurality of second dots positioned on said first dots and facing said front surface of the screen, said second dots defining a first image for reflection by the front surface of the screen to create a virtual image of the first image;

- the exposed surface of the back wall being at least partially observable through the front side of the front panel; and
- the virtual image being located substantially in the plane of the exposed surface, such that the virtual image appears to be located behind the screen.

18. An assembly according to claim 17 in which the virtual image and the objects comprising the exposed surface appear to be substantially continuous relative to each other.

19. An assembly according to claim 17 additionally comprising:

- a viewing region positioned on the front surface of the screen;

- a flame image subassembly for providing at least one image of flames at least partially transmittable through the viewing region; and

- the screen comprising an observation region through which the exposed surface is at least partially observable.

20. An assembly according to claim 19 in which the screen comprises a transition region disposed between the observation region and the viewing region, and the exposed surface is at least partially observable through the transition region.

21. An assembly according to claim 17 in which the objects comprise firebricks forming a brick wall.

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